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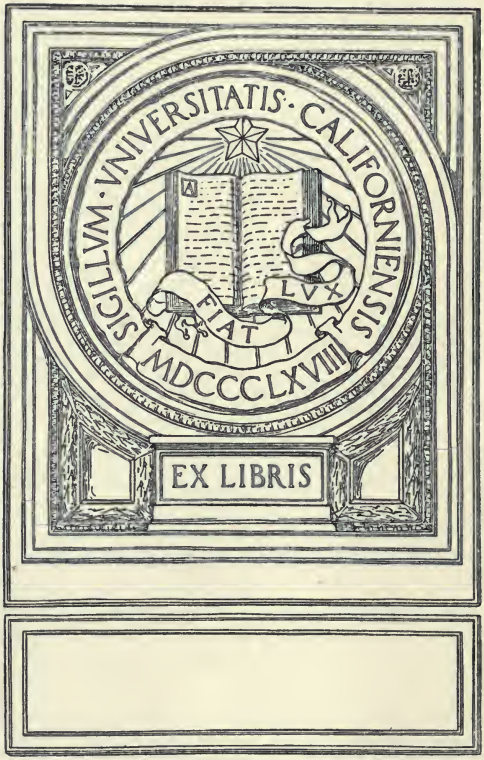
MILTON

AND

LIBERTY

W. MORISON, D.D.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MILTON AND LIBERTY

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BY

WILLIAM MORISON, D.D.

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PREFACE

MILTON'S political writings possess more than a biographical value — they have a message for our own time. The more democracy spreads the more it is to be desired that the people should be so inspired and guided that they will make a noble use of their freedom. Such inspiration and guidance are found pre-eminently in Milton. The people who follow his doctrine of liberty will make more of duties than of rights, and value rights mainly as the means of performing duties. They will use their power, not to compete with one another for material well-being or any private advantage, but for mutual service and the common good. Without such an ideal, democracy will only, as Mazzini has said, "produce egotists who will carry the old passions and desires into the new order of things."

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TO

My Faithful Friends

THE MEMBERS OF ROSEHALL CHURCH

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MILTON AND LIBERTY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY—MILTON'S POLITICAL HISTORY

It will be a fitting introduction to this book to enquire the causes of Milton's diversion for so many years of his life from poetry to politics, to trace the progress of his political opinions, and to give the historical setting of his controversial writings.

Milton did not compose his prose works as pieces of literature, nor did he write professionally. An inborn impulse drove him to it; and his pen was as practical as Cromwell's sword.

We learn from himself that from his early years he was interested in public causes, and had a mind bent to the service of the Commonweal. Moreover, he had an egotistical nature which led him at once to regard his own convictions as of universal value, and to defend them, when opposed, as a piece of personal property. He always took himself seriously — as in fact an

incarnation of the principles for which he stood. It is one of his own sayings: "I conceived myself to be now not as mine own person, but as a member incorporate with that truth whereof I was persuaded, and whereof I had declared myself openly to be the partaker."

The impulse to the service of great causes is often accompanied by an opposite feeling, so that the man who has it is at once urged forward and held back. This happens when the social disposition is strong, and when it costs one a great deal to "vary from the kindly race of men." Milton felt little of the pain of difference from his fellows. It has been said that "when the Spirit chooses you for its scribe to publish some commandment, it makes you odious to men, and men odious to you, and you shall accept that loathsomeness with joy." Of the truth of this saying, Milton is a notable instance.

That Milton would take a side in the great national questions of his time, and that he would be on the side of liberty, might have been predicted. The sense of personal dignity and the necessity for self-expression were so innate to him that every form of absolutism was bound to find in him a determined foe.

The atmosphere in which he was brought up was one that fostered a public spirit and a high

sense of the duties of citizenship. There were many shades of Puritanism, but they had all a common root in the consciousness of a lofty moral ideal, not only for the individual, but also for the corporate life. Milton's father was a Puritan of so wholesome a type, that his son never felt any desire to break away from the traditions in which he had been reared. He was a man of culture and accomplishments, and of some eminence in his day as a composer of music. In the Latin poem "Ad Patrem," in which Milton consoles his father for the disappointment he had caused him by turning aside from the Church to literature, he playfully asks why the choice should have surprised him, made, as it was, by the son of a father gifted in a cognate art. There was no narrowness or harshness—there was neither extravagance nor violence in the Puritanism in which Milton was bred; and all the more because of that it entered into the deeps of his nature. It was of the mild and restrained type which only became restive when the tyranny of the Government, alike in Church and State, passed beyond all bounds.

Milton often refers to the care his father bestowed on everything connected with his education. It is therefore significant that he had as his tutor, when he was at St. Paul's School,

a Puritan minister, and one who was zealous above most in the Puritan cause, namely, Thomas Young, a Perthshire Scot by birth, who crossed the Border after studying in St. Andrews, took orders in the Church of England, and in the course of time became Vicar of Stowmarket and Master of Jesus College, Cambridge. He was the leading spirit among the five divines who in 1641 published the famous anti-Episcopal book under the title of "Smectymnuus," in the defence of which Milton first appeared in public controversy. A warm friendship was formed between Young and his illustrious pupil, which lasted through life. In a Latin metrical epistle, which Milton, when a student, addressed to his old tutor who, at the time, was pastor of the English congregation in Hamburg, there is evidence of the sympathy that existed between the two in matters of religion, and of the deep feeling which had been already roused in Milton in favour of religious liberty.

At the university Milton's Puritan proclivities gained in strength. The reasons that led his father to send him to Cambridge rather than to Oxford are not known. De Quincey, in his sketch of the "Life of Milton," states that there are grounds for believing that Puritan politics prevailed among the fellows of the college—

Christ's College it was—which he joined; but this is uncertain. There is no doubt, however, that university life confirmed his Puritan convictions and temper. Cambridge was no more congenial to him than it was, more than a century and a half afterwards, to Wordsworth; but it was for different reasons. In his case, it was because of his discontent with the university system as part and parcel of the Conservative structure of all the national institutions of the time. His quarrel, early in his second year, with his tutor Chappell, his dissatisfaction with the methods of teaching and his advocacy of reform—above all the aversion he conceived for his clerical fellow students, gave unmistakable indication of the direction in which his mind was travelling. He was moving further and further away from the established order. How long the intention with which he entered the university of studying for the Church survived we do not know, but before his curriculum was finished it had vanished, and a determined hostility to the Church, as it was constituted, had taken root in his mind. If we turn to his writings when a student—whether to his Letters or his Poems—we find in them—alike in their subjects and their tone—a steady growth of the Puritan spirit.

On leaving Cambridge, Milton went to reside

with his father at Horton; and he remained there up to 1638. This was the period when he produced "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," "Arcades," "Comus" and "Lycidas." In these works his moral idealism always progresses, and in the last two the allusions to the two contrary spirits that were striving for ascendency in English life are frequent and passionate. In "Lycidas," the sudden outburst, in so unfitting a context, against the hireling clergy, gave a momentary revelation of the dangerous temper which the rule of Laud had roused in him as in so many more of the noblest spirits of the time. It was a jet of hot flame thrown up from the unquiet fires that burned in his heart.

Milton travelled on the Continent for fifteen months—from April 1638 to July 1639. In Florence, in Rome, and in Naples he was admitted to the society of many distinguished scholars and men of letters, and his intercourse with them, and the complaints he heard from them regarding the restriction of freedom in Italy, made him desire more than ever to see freedom preserved in his own country, and furnished him with a powerful argument when he came to plead for it with his own pen. A few years afterwards, in attacking the censorship of the Press, he wrote:—
"I could recount what I have seen and heard in

other countries, where this kind of inquisition tyrannises; when I have sat among their learned men (for that honour I had), and been counted happy to be born in such a place of philosophic freedom as they supposed England was, while themselves did nothing but bemoan the servile condition into which learning amongst them was brought; that this was it which had damped the glory of Italian wits; that nothing had been there written now these many years but flattery and fustian. Then it was that I found and visited the famous Galileo, grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition, for thinking on astronomy otherwise than the Franciscan and Dominican licensers thought. And though I knew that England then was groaning loudest under the prelatical yoke, nevertheless, I took it as a pledge of future happiness that other nations were so persuaded of her liberty."

It was when travelling in Italy that Milton came to the resolution to take an active part in the struggle which the English Parliament had so long maintained with the King. It was fast coming to a head, and during the second year of his sojourn in Italy it had taken a critical turn in Charles's first Bishops' War with the Scots. On hearing of it, Milton at once cut short his travels and turned his steps home with the

avowed intention of devoting all his energy to the furtherance of civil and religious freedom in England. Other two years, however, elapsed before he became known in public life. These two years were occupied with literary pursuits, and mainly in revolving subjects for an epic poem. He, at length, had chosen his theme and made the first draft of "Paradise Lost." He was "pluming his wings and meditating flight," when a call came to him to begin the work to which he stood pledged in his own conscience, and he put his epic aside.

Milton did not abandon literature as he abandoned the Church—with no intention to return to it. But the breath of Song was not so imperative as the voice of Duty, and he took the momentous step with characteristic decision.

Milton's political life, of which his prose works are the monument, extended over nearly twenty years—from 1641 to 1660—from his thirty-third to his fifty-second year. When it began, it was the Bishops who were the centre of the conflict between Charles and the Parliament, and it was in the anti-Episcopal agitation that Milton launched his first pamphlet. There was a fitness in this, for there was no institution in which he felt so deep an interest as the Church, or which he had such a desire to see reformed. With all

Milton's public fightings there was a private quarrel conjoined, the reason being, as we have already said, that he took himself to be an embodiment of every cause in which he was engaged. It was so in this instance. He never forgave the Bishops for making it impossible for him to enter the ministry of the Church.

The Long Parliament opened in November 1640, and one of the main questions which occupied its early sessions was Church Reform. The most powerful party in the Commons, and probably in the country also, was in favour of the abolition of Episcopacy. In January 1641 one of the bishops, between whom and Milton many a merciless blow came to be exchanged—Bishop Hall—issued his "Humble Remonstrance" against a petition that had been presented to the House in favour of the Root-and-Branch policy. He was answered within a few weeks in "Smectymnuus." That Milton had been in conference with the authors of this work—one of them Young, his old tutor—and that he had a hand in it, has been established. It was some three months later—probably in June 1641—that Milton published his first pamphlet, which appeared under the title "Of Reformation touching Church Discipline in England, and the Causes that have hitherto hindered it." It was followed in rapid

succession by other four anti-Episcopal pamphlets, namely, "On Prelatical Episcopacy," "Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence against Smectymnuus," "The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelacy," and "An Apology against a Pamphlet called A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions of the Remonstrant against Smectymnuus."

Milton's attitude to the English Church, and the nature of the reform which he sought to effect in it, will be discussed in subsequent pages. It is sufficient for our present purpose to note the position he had come to adopt on the Church question and the arguments by which he supported it. He attached himself to the party which sought to make a clean sweep of Episcopacy. His first contention against it is, that it has no scriptural authority. Here he takes up the ground that was common to the Puritans, and which Hooker so powerfully controverted, namely, that a discipline for the Church is prescribed in Scripture, although he sometimes inconsistently pleads for the broad and free exercise of the human intellect in such a matter. In the next place, he denies that the modern Episcopacy bore any resemblance to that of the primitive Church. Further, it stood condemned at the bar of experience and history. It had destroyed the minis-

terial character of the clergy, and taken away the rights of the Christian people. Its discipline was at once too lax and too rigid. Heedless of the weightier matters of the law—of purity and good living—it imposed an iron uniformity, in creed and ritual. Its influence on the State had been no less injurious. In England, when ambitious prelates were not conspiring against the authority of the King, they were employed as his tools in taming the people to tyranny.

The reform which Milton advocated at this stage was virtually that the Episcopal should be displaced by the Presbyterian discipline, although he no doubt contemplated a more elastic form of Presbytery than any which was in operation; and he would have excluded the courts of the Church from the use of any means of discipline that were not strictly spiritual, and from the exercise of all temporal power. The two following passages from his fourth and most important pamphlet, "The Reason of Church Government," etc., are conclusive as to his position on the Church question being as we have stated it. In the first, he says: "I shall in the meantime not cease to hope through the mercy and grace of Christ, the head and husband of the Church, that England shortly is to belong neither to see Patriarchal nor see Prelatical, but to the faithful

feeding and disciplining of that ministerial order which the blessed Apostles constituted throughout the Churches; and this, I shall assay to prove, can be no other than that of Presbytery and Deacons." In the second, he is still more emphatic: "So little is it that I fear lest any crookedness, any wrinkle or spot, should be found in Presbyterial government, that if Bodin, the famous French writer, though a Papist, yet affirms that the Commonwealth which maintains this discipline will certainly flourish in virtue and piety, I dare assure myself that every true Protestant will admire the integrity, the uprightness, the divine and gracious purposes thereof, and even for the reason of it, so coherent with the doctrine of the Gospel, besides the evident command of Scripture, will confess it to be the only true Church government."

Within a few months of the publication of Milton's last anti-Episcopal pamphlet the Civil War broke out. On 22nd August 1642 the Royal Standard was raised at Nottingham. During the following winter and spring no man in England could settle to write or read pamphlets. "These were," says Carlyle, "the most confused months England ever saw. In every shire, in every parish, in courthouses, alehouses, churches, markets, wheresoever men were gathered

together, England, with sorrowful confusion in every fibre, is tearing itself into hostile halves."

We only get one glimpse of Milton's life during that winter. It is in the sonnet, "When the Assault was intended to the City." There is an elation of spirit in the verses which shows that he was unaffected by the panic which seized the citizens of London when they heard that the Royalist Army with the King at its head was within seven miles of their gates. That was like Milton. He was not given to alarms. There is another note in the sonnet which is still more characteristic—the consciousness he shows that his writings were secure of immortality. He had it in his power to "requite" any who befriended him and spread his name—

> "O'er lands and sea
> Whatever climes the sun's bright circle warms."

It was an event of private life—his desertion by his newly-wedded wife—that occasioned his next group of pamphlets. These were his Four Tracts—"The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce," "The Judgment of Martin Bucer concerning Divorce," "Tetrachordon and Colasterion," "The Letter on Education and the Areopagitica." These were all issued between August 1643 and March 1645. In Milton's own classification of his prose

works they are set down as writings on Domestic Liberty.

The publishing of the Four Tracts, in which he contends for free divorce, led to a rupture between Milton and the Presbyterians which was never healed, and to a broadening of his views on all questions of Church and State. The tracts were denounced on every hand, and by none more severely than the Presbyterians. In the Parliament and the Westminster Assembly they took the lead in attacking them, and using them as an argument for a stricter censorship of the Press; and it is against their party that the "Areopagitica" is mainly directed. Presbyterianism presented a different side to Milton now that it was no longer in opposition. In its aspiring to compulsory power and to the support of the civil magistrate in the execution of spiritual discipline, and in its rejection of the doctrine of toleration—"we detest it," were the words used by the London ministers—it was no better than the system of Church government it sought to displace. From this period a total severance of Church and State became Milton's objective, and meanwhile he laboured to secure liberty for Nonconformists of every shade.

Milton's breach with the Presbyterians was permanent, and his feelings towards them always

grew more embittered. His self-restraint is as remarkable a feature of his poems as the lack of it is of his prose, but in his three anti-Presbyterian Sonnets — the two "On the Detraction which followed my Writing certain Treatises," and that "On the Forcers of Conscience"—it gives way. He bore a grudge against their party to his grave, as the undoers of all that the Civil War had accomplished for English freedom.

It is part of the curriculum of all who fight for freedom that they must shed old friends as the battle advances.

Milton found his new allies in those who were contemptuously spoken of as sectaries by the dominant religious party. He took it as an honour rather than a reproach to be identified with them. He had never known, he said, any one who was in earnest in religion who had not been called a sectary. All his hope of seeing in England what he so eagerly desired — a Free Church in a Free State—hung on the growing power of the sects that owned neither Priest nor Presbyter. No one watched the gradual weakening of the Presbyterians in the Parliament with more pleasure. No one was more overjoyed when the New-Model Army swept all before it and speedily brought the First Civil War to a close at Naseby, and three years

afterwards closed as brilliantly the Second Civil War at Preston and Colchester. It was the Presbyterian-Royalists who gave strength to the last rising on behalf of Charles I., and it was their defeat that gave Milton most satisfaction. Of his elation when he heard of it, we have a lasting monument in his sonnet, "To the Lord General Fairfax."

We are now approaching the date when Milton's personal fortunes came to be entirely bound up with those of the Commonwealth.

Before taking the field on the outbreak of the Second Civil War, the soldiers of the New-Model Army had held a meeting for prayer, at the close of which they resolved "that it was a duty if ever the Lord brought them back again to call Charles Stuart, that man of blood, to account for the blood he had shed and mischief he had done to his utmost against the Lord's cause, and people, and this poor nation."

It was when this resolution was carried out and the King brought to trial that Milton wrote his next pamphlet—the first of the series of *political* pamphlets, viz.: "The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, proving that it is Lawful and hath been held so through all Ages, in any who have the Power, to call to account a Tyrant, a wicked King, and after due Correction, to depose and put

him to Death, if the ordinary Magistrate have neglected or denied to do it. And that They who of Late so much blame deposing are the Men that did it Themselves."

Written on the eve of the trial, it was not issued till the trial was concluded. It appeared a fortnight after the execution of the King, and a week after the proclamation of the Republic. It was an unqualified vindication of the King's Triers. Milton never failed in courage, but with one exception perhaps, to which our sketch of his political career will soon bring us, he never displayed it more than in this act.

This pamphlet led, as well it might—it was by the earliness and warmth of its support so chivalrous an act of friendship—to the new Council of State calling him to one of its offices. He was made Latin Secretary to the Republic. The office was not of his seeking; but if he had no ambition for this honour or the emoluments which it brought, as little did he shrink from its labours or its risks. We have an account of his appointment from his own hand in a later pamphlet, where, after mentioning all the controversial writings he had published up to the time of the King's trial, he goes on to say: "Concerning the Royal Power, nothing was written by me until the King, having been

voted an enemy by the Parliament, and having been vanquished in war, was pleading his cause as a prisoner before his judges, and was capitally condemned. Then, at length, indeed, when certain Presbyterian ministers, formerly most hostile to Charles, indignant that the Independent party should now be preferred to theirs, and should be more powerful in Parliament, were raising a clamour over the sentence of her Parliament pronounced upon the King (not that they were angry at the deed, but because their own faction had not been the agents), and as far as they could, were promoting tumult, daring to affirm that the doctrine of Protestants and all the Reformed Churches abhorred such an atrocious procedure against kings, I, considering that such an open falsehood ought to be publicly contradicted, did not even yet write or advise anything concerning Charles individually, but showed, with production of not a few testimonies of the chief theologians, what in a general way was lawful against tyrants, and attacked, almost in propagandist style, the gross ignorance and imprudence of men professing better things. That book did not come forth till after the King's death, written as it was rather for composing men's minds than for causing any specific determination against Charles — a business belonging not to me but to the magis-

trates, and which, indeed, had then been finished. All this service of mine, now to the Church, now to the State, I gave gratuitously within my own private walls; from neither Church nor State had I anything in return beyond present safety—a good conscience, a good reputation with good men, and this honest liberty of speech, were independent possessions. Some people about me were drawing wealth to themselves, others honours, without trouble; but no one ever saw me going about, no one ever saw me asking anything among my friends, or stationed at the doors of the Court with a petitioner's face, or haunting entries of lesser assemblies. I kept myself almost entirely at home, managing on my own resources, though in this civil tumult these were often in great part kept from me, and contriving, though burdened with taxes, in the main rather oppressive, to lead my frugal life. All this past and done, imagining I should now have abundance of leisure, I turned myself to the task of drawing out, if I could, in a continuous thread of narrative, the history of my country from its first beginnings to these present times. I had finished four books, when lo! Charles's kingdom, having been formed into a Republic, the Council of State, as it is called, then first set up by the authority of Parliament,

invites me, dreaming of nothing of the sort, to a post in connection with it, with a view to the use of my services, chiefly in foreign affairs."

Milton held the Secretaryship up to the eve of the Restoration. The "Letters of State," which owed their form if not their substance to his pen, are all characterised by qualities which, at the most, only appear intermittently in his pamphlets. In their restraint and dignity and courtesy, not less than in the firmness of their tone and temper, they were worthy of the people and the Government in whose name they were sent.

As Latin Secretary he was a salaried official. But at the request of the Council he undertook, and at a time when his health was failing, and blindness was coming upon him, other services for the Republic, which were not paid and which could not be paid, and whose only recompense lay in his consciousness that he was rendering them to liberty, "his noble task." He became the apologist of the Commonwealth in a series of pamphlets which made its authority respected and his own name renowned in every country in Europe.

The first of these pamphlets (May 1649) was the "Observation on the Articles of Peace with the Irish Rebels, and the Letter of Ormond to Colonel Jones and the Representative of the Presbytery at Belfast." The next (October

1649) was the "Eikonoklastes"—written to counteract the immense effect on the popular mind of the "Eikon Basilike," which appeared in the King's name, and professed to be a "Portraiture of His Sacred Majesty in his Solitude and Sufferings."

In November of the same year there appeared in Holland a book—"Defensio Regia pro Carolo I." by Salmasius, who held Joseph Scaliger's Chair at the University of Leyden. Salmasius had the reputation of a polymath—was indeed a prodigious scholar of the acquisitive type and a voluminous author, but a man of little intellectual weight and of very facile character. He was feed by Charles, who was then at The Hague, to do this piece of work, and done it was, expeditiously, and with such loaded adulation of the memory of Charles I., and such truculence to those who had put him to his trial and death as entirely to satisfy his royal patron and paymaster.

To this book, Milton's next pamphlet (April 1661) was a reply. It was entitled "Pro Populo. Anglicano Defensio Contra Salmasium." This book, with those that rose out of the same occasion and that continued the controversy—his "Defensio Secunda" (May 1664), a reply to the anonymous answer to the "Defensio," "Regii Sanguinis Clamor ad Cœlum adversus Parricidos Anglicanos,"

attributed to Alexander Morus, although he denied the authorship—his "Defensio pro se" (August 1665) in reply to Morus's public testimony against the calumnies of John Milton—were the *chefs d'œuvre* of Milton as a political pamphleteer—not indeed on account of their greater literary merit or more permanent interest, except as regards their autobiographical passages and the portraits they contain of the chiefs of the Republic; nor because they are freer from the rabid controversial temper of the time, for in this respect they are his very worst, but because of the representative character in which he wrote them, the vaster constituency to which they were addressed, and the splendid service they rendered to the cause which he defended. He wrote them as the champion of the Commonwealth of England: they were read (to use his own words) "throughout the wide expanse of anxious and listening Europe," and so overwhelming was their immediate effect that his original antagonist slunk out of the controversy covered with the ridicule of those who had regarded him as an oracle. His next assailant had to adopt the shield of anonymity; and when he was even more mercilessly punished, there was no other who was willing to risk the same fate. Through these pamphlets Milton's name became so famous in foreign

countries that Aubrey tells us "he was mightily importuned to go into France and Italy. Foreigners much admired him and offered him great preferments to come over to them, and chiefly came to England to see O. Protector and Mr. J. Milton, and would see the house and chamber where he was born."

The principles of Civil Liberty contained in this group of pamplets and the relations of Milton to Cromwell and his Government as disclosed in them will be treated in later chapters. We need only in this place mark the progress in Milton's political opinions which appears in them. He had not started with anti-monarchical views, although he had always maintained that a monarchy was legitimate only in so far as it existed with the good-will of the people. But he had now become a keen Republican, and in the settlement of the State after the death of Charles the one course that was regarded by him as intolerable was a return to the Monarchy. It was not only the rule of one person he would have the nation discard, but also the ends and methods which had been pursued by that form of government. He would have it abandon the statesmanship which is mainly taken up with military, diplomatic and fiscal concerns, and cultivate that whose aim is to make a virtuous, free and contented people.

From 1655 to 1659 Milton rested from controversy. During that interval no successors of Salmasius and Morus arose for him to flagellate, and he did not intermeddle, in public at least, with the questions that divided the Republican party under the Protectorate.

After Cromwell's death Milton returned to the field of political contention. In February 1659 he published a pamphlet entitled, "A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes showing that it is not Lawful for any Power on Earth to compel in Matters of Religion"; and in August it was followed by another on "The Likeliest Means to remove Hirelings out of the Church." The first was addressed to Richard Cromwell's Parliament, the second to the succeeding Parliament—both short-lived. In them he pleads for what of all reforms he had most at heart—the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church. He had failed to persuade Cromwell to pass such measures, and in these pamphlets he reflects upon the Protector on that account. He had evidently some hope that his successors in the Government would entertain them more favourably.

Concerns, however, of even greater moment began to engage those who were in authority. The *coup d'état*, in October, by which the Army broke up the Parliament, which was made up of

the restored Rump, threw the Government into confusion. At this crisis Milton, alarmed as he well might be for the safety of the Republic, came forward to mediate between the Army and the Parliament, and in "A Letter to a Friend concerning the Ruptures of the Commonwealth" proposed as a *modus vivendi* that the Government should be lodged in a Council of State approved by the Army—the two to be sworn to support each other and pledged to the maintenance of liberty of conscience and the abjuration of the Monarchy.

In the following February Monk entered London and became Dictator, and from that time the Restoration was assured. Milton, refusing to admit to himself a prospect so abhorrent, issued in March a pamphlet containing a remonstrance with the nation against the course on which it was bent, along with a scheme for a new Constitution of the Republic. At the same time he sent a letter to Monk repeating the substance of the pamphlet. Great had been his courage when he came forward a few days after it was set up to declare his adhesion to the Republic; but it was even greater when at the last hour of its existence, and with every sign pointing to the recall of the son of the executed King, he dared to address to the nation a manifesto containing so fierce a

denunciation of the Monarchy and of the character of Charles II., and so vehement an appeal to abide by the Commonwealth. No "shape of fear could dismay" Milton. He had, in an extraordinary degree, the moral nerve of the quatrain:—

> "He either fears his fate too much
> Or his desert is small,
> That dares not put it to the touch
> To gain or lose it all."

With the Restoration Milton's voice in the counsels of the nation was silenced. He felt he was as good as banished from England. He could scarcely be said to live in a country where he was deprived of the rights of citizenship. But there was still a Republic left to him where he found a refuge from the "vext region" at his feet. The world has no cause to lament the fate that drove him back to his first love. But that in his seclusion he continued an unrepentant Puritan—that he felt no regrets and no misgivings regarding the part he had played in the national life—that the old fire burned all the hotter with him when its flame was smothered — he showed in many ways, and in none more unmistakably than in the last, as it is one of the greatest of his poems, in which, under the guise of an old Hebrew story, he tells the tragedy of his own

life, and proclaims his unshaken conviction that the cause he had represented and his own name, now apparently "extinguished quite," would one day be reclothed with power and overwhelm their enemies with shame.

CHAPTER II

MILTON'S MORAL LOFTINESS—HIS SELF-REVERENCE

MILTON'S life was one distinguished by a singular integrity. The same principles shaped and the same spirit animated all its parts. The key to the understanding of his citizenship and public life is to be found in the most inward qualities of his nature.

For loftiness of character and genius in one, Milton is peerless among Englishmen. Each of these magnitudes entered into and helped to compose the other. His character vitalised and consecrated his genius, and was in turn confirmed and enriched by the employment of his genius on its pure and sublime ideals. The two were as inseparable as the wings of the eagle; and had either been less strenuous, he could not have soared to the steadfast Empyrean where his fame rests. In his poetry, he gave the world an imaginative edition of the ideals of which his life was first the exponent. His genius was largely his character taking effect in art, and

his writings were the rendering in terms of art of the "true poem" of his life.

Milton united in himself the best in Puritanism with the best in what Puritanism excluded. His character was a composite of the most honourable elements in both. But there can be no question as to which had the dominance. When we "delve him to the root" we find there the Puritan passion for righteousness. That was the *primum quærite*. He subordinated everything to the moral life. Genius and intellectual gifts resolved themselves for him into depth of moral passion. "True eloquence," he says, "I find to be none but the serious and hearty love of truth; and that whose mind soever is fully possessed with a fervent desire to know good things, and with the dearest charity to infuse the knowledge of them into others, when such a man would speak, his words, by what I can express, like so many nimble and airy servitors, trip about him at command, and in well-ordered files, as he would wish, fall aptly into their own places." Milton was never slow in sacrificing the delight which genius finds in its own exercise at the stern call of Duty. He never hesitated to forego the artist's joy to perform even her most odious tasks. There is no parallel, so far as I know, in literary history to his magnanimous conduct, when, after assaying

his genius in the poems of his youth, in his odes, in his "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," and after meditating "Paradise Lost," planning the structure and collecting the material of the cathedral in epic song which his imagination ultimately reared, he risked the loss of his immortal wreath at the call of his country's need, laid aside his "singing-robes" and transferred all his genius and his industry to the struggle for liberty. This preference of the splendour of common duty to the glory of personal renown is one of the most radiant things in history. Blind critics surely they are who regard the part he took in the controversy of the nation as a waste of his genius, who do not recognise in the man who made such a sacrifice an even greater Milton than the author of "Paradise Lost," nor perceive that it was in the service of the Commonwealth he collected much of the augmented power that appeared in his later poems. Dante places the saints who had been great servants of men in the Heaven of the Sun —the Heaven of the prudent in heavenly things —for service makes God known as truly as the deepest thought. Milton's choice was a great renunciation. If it was an error, it was one of which he never repented. On the contrary, he often vindicates it in his writings; and of all the deeds of his life, it was the one of which he

was proudest. It showed unmistakably the spirit of the Puritan. He left the field in which fame was to be won, where he had no rival, and where his achievements when he returned to it brought him timeless honour, to enter an arena where he was soiled with the dust and heat of conflict and encountered "a world of disesteem." It was not only the delight of his art he renounced — he sacrificed much besides which his temperament and culture led him to love. "Susceptible," as Emerson says of him, "to the attractions of historical prescription, of royalty, of chivalry, of an ancient Church, illustrated by old martyrdoms and installed in cathedrals, he threw himself, the flower of elegancy, on the side of the reeking conventicle, the side of humanity, but unlearned and unadorned."

In one of his controversial pamphlets Milton lays bare the basis of his character in what he speaks of as "an inward reverence towards his own person." He who has this will fear not so much the offence and reproach of others, as he dreads, and would blush at the reflection of his own severe and modest eye upon himself. We are familiar, in biography, with confessions of the sins of youth. But Milton's confessions were of its purity. "A certain niceness of nature, an honest haughtiness and self-esteem . . . kept me

above low descents. . . . My mind gave me that every free and gentle spirit, without an oath, ought to be born a knight, nor needed to expect the gilt spur, or the laying on of a sword upon his shoulder to stir him up to secure and protect the weakness of any attempted chastity. So that books, which to many others have been the fuel of wantonness and loose living, I cannot think how, unless by divine indulgence, proved to me so many incitements to the love and steadfast observations of virtue." In closing an account of the fifteen months he spent in continental travel, after leaving Cambridge, when he visited Paris, Florence, Rome, Naples, and other cities, he says: "I take God to witness that in all those places, where so many things are considered lawful, I lived sound and untouched from all profligacy and vice, having the thought perpetually with me, that though I might escape the eyes of men, I certainly could not the eyes of God." At a later date, when he had passed mid-life, he makes a still more remarkable statement of his freedom from all accusing memories: "I am unwilling to exchange my consciousness of rectitude with that of any other person. . . . I find the recollection a treasured store of tranquillity and delight."

These and other like passages in his writings were in a measure forced from him by the exigen-

cies of public controversy. He had to vindicate his character as the defender of a great cause against the aspersions of unscrupulous opponents. But even when provocation was absent, he was not reluctant to write in the same strain. In a letter to his *amicus amicissimus*, Charles Diodati, he claims that God had instilled into his soul such a vehement love of the beautiful, that he was wont day and night to seek for it through all the forms and faces of things; and that he always felt himself bound by a real necessity to attach himself to wise and noble spirits wherever he found them. And from youth to age his language concerning himself is always pitched in the same key. It is to be allowed, whether it be to his praise or blame, that no man ever exceeded Milton in self-consciousness and self-appreciation. In his case it resembled the reverence which men cherish for an idealised character. No apologetic word is found in his pages—no prick of remembrance from any action or from his conduct in any relation, public or private. Apologies are admirable when they are needed and sincere; but carefulness in the avoidance of conduct that requires them is much more admirable; and that was pre-eminently a virtue of Milton. In his autobiographical references there is also a singular absence of spiritual self-reproach,

of the penitential and confessional note, of the shadow which falls on the purest souls in the presence of the Infinite Goodness. That haunting sense of sin which has darkened the life of so many of the noblest men, seems never to have visited his spirit. It would appear as if he never needed to drink of the waters of *Lethe:* but that of the waters of *Eunoe*, the stream that refreshes every memory of what has been good in life, he drank continually. I shall here only say of this feature of Milton's character what *Christian* in "The Pilgrim's Progress" said, with a smile, regarding one of the mysteries of the "Interpreter's House": "Verily, I think, I know the meaning of this." There will be occasion to return to it. But there are two respects in which it leaves nothing for discussion. A claim to moral excellence may often be its own disproof by the evidence it gives of the absence of a high ideal. No one can allege this of Milton. And as little can anyone refuse to acknowledge in his case the nobility of the actual life, which is always a man's best self-revelation. And if his life were as little known as it is well known, if we only knew him as a writer, if we knew no more than that he wrote "Comus," we might well feel that in his self-approbation he was modest withal. It needed a white soul to write "Comus." In a

letter to Charles Diodati, he said of one who would write high things: "Let him live sparely, let herbs afford his innocent diet, let clear water in a beechen cup stand near him, and let him drink sober draughts from a pure fountain; to this be added a youth chaste and free from guilt, and of rigid morals and hands without stain." Who but one that had followed his own counsels —who but one "born a knight" and purified with "lustral waters" could have written the poem in which he treats in the noblest language the noblest theme—the inviolableness of virtue and the invisible auxiliaries that attend her?

> "None
> But good men can give good things,"

is one of his sayings in this very poem. Who does not recognise the self-reflected honour with which it covers Milton?

While none who knew Milton's life will have their admiration of it lowered by his own consciousness of its moral elevation, and while as surely none who know his writings will accuse him of under-valuing the virtue of humility and the grace of charity, his character would have inspired us with a more perfect regard, had its severity been tempered by more sympathy with human weakness, and his extraordinary virtues

been accompanied by more of ordinary human kindness.

Of his intellectual gifts and his literary genius Milton speaks as unabashedly as of his moral excellence. "It was found," he says, when writing of the time when he left the university, "that whether aught was imposed by those that had the overlooking of me or betaken to me of my own choice, in English or other tongues, prosing or versing, but especially the latter, the style, by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live." In the way of frank confession of self-esteem, he could no further go than he did in a letter to a friend in France: "Many have been celebrated for their compositions, whose common conversation and intercourse have betrayed no marks of sublimity or genius; but as far as possible I aim to shew myself equal in thought and speech to what I have written, if I have written anything well." No thinker, no writer, had ever a greater sense of self-sufficiency. For no name of authority, the most august, the most venerable, had he so much respect as for the independent judgment of his own mind. There was no oracle to him like the light that shone within his own soul. In "Paradise Regained," he lays it down as a canon for reading, that it is profitless unless the reader brings to it a spirit

and judgment equal or superior, "and what he brings, what need he elsewhere seek?" The tone implies that the writer was one who could kindle his own fire and did not need to borrow. Milton almost never quotes. "My mother bore me," he said, "to be a speaker of what God made mine own, and not a translator of other men's thoughts." When, in his controversial writings, he adduces any authority in support of his argument, it is with an aversion he is at no pains to conceal; it is only, he tells us, out of deference to weak minds that must entrench themselves behind great names to feel secure in their opinions. And it was in vain for his opponents to think of abashing Milton, by producing authorities against his doctrines. No concessions, even to the most illustrious, could be extorted from him. When great men were quoted as shields for error, he handled them with as much freedom as though they had been nobodies. "Common stales for every politic fetch that was on foot"—so, in one of his pamphlets, he wrote of Cranmer, and Ridley, and Latimer when they came in the way of his argument for reformation in the Church. "More tolerable were it for the Church of God that all these names were utterly abolished, like the brazen serpent, than that man's fond opinion should thus idolise them, and

the heavenly truth be thus captivated." The Fathers fared no better at his hand. "Whatsoever time, or the heedless hand of blind chance, hath drawn from of old to this present in his huge drag-net, whether fish or seaweed, shells or shrubs, unpicked, unchosen — these are the Fathers."

No one in the Puritan ranks knew better than Milton himself the value of his services to their cause, how powerful an engine his pen was in its defence, and how formidable to its opponents. When he speaks, as he often does, of deeds of valour rendered to the Commonwealth as resplendent as any that were ever performed on the field of battle, it is with a proud direction of his thought to his own controversial writings. When he sat down to compose his "Defensio Secunda," he tells us he was exhilarated by the knowledge that he would have Europe for his audience, and that every friend of liberty at home and abroad was waiting on his lips.

All this is true, and yet his modesty remains. "No one," as Professor Raleigh says, "has dared to call him vain. His estimate of himself, offered as simple fact, has been accepted in the same spirit."

CHAPTER III

MILTON AND THE CHURCH

We know from his own lips that Milton, from his childhood, was destined by the intentions of his parents and by his own resolutions to the service of the Church. When he became a student in Cambridge this was still his purpose, and though it became unsettled while he was passing through the university, it was only at the close of his curriculum that he finally abandoned it. He has left us in no doubt as to his reason. He stumbled at the subscription and oath required of candidates for holy orders—he "thought it better to prefer a blameless silence, before the sacred office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing." He had already given these pledges in order to qualify himself for graduation: but when they were required of him in new circumstances—as a preliminary, not merely to an academic honour, but to a vocation—they assumed a graver character which made him pause. Had he, however,

approved the way in which the Church was governed, had its rulers been of a less intolerant temper, it is probable that his scruples would have given way. It was the growing ascendency of the hierarchical party that offended the Puritan spirit of Milton and made him revolt against the Church. A mind so serious as his and so concerned with what is vital—one so spacious in its horizon and so winged for soaring in the realm of truth—could only turn away with contempt from a church ruled by men whose passion was ceremonial, and whose chief care for the clergy was that they should be drilled in the proper use of vestments. Whenever Milton approaches the subject of ritual you can see his nostrils inflating with scorn and his lips framing themselves to utter their most satiric words. It was not the dressing of the inward man that was the ritualist's care — "not in robes of pure innocency did he apparel himself, but of pure linen with other deformed and fantastic dresses, in palls and mitres, gold and gewgaws, fetched from Aaron's old wardrobe or the flamen's vestry. The spirit, relieved of her religious duties by her colleague the body, took her ease, shifted off from herself the labours of high soaring, and forgot her heavenly flight." Milton never wrote with more keenness nor force than when he was arguing

against ceremonialism. In his description of evening worship in Paradise, he expresses his own soul on this subject:—

> "Other rites
> Observing none, but adoration pure
> Which God likes best, into their inmost bower
> Handed they went."

The restrictions imposed on the clergy in preaching, as well as the enforced uniformity in worship, were insufferable to one whose love of liberty was so ardent. Where freedom was so fettered, his eagle-spirit would have been caged. There have been few men for whom self-repression has been more difficult. Milton's spirit could not have breathed in an institution where he would have been prohibited from criticising or reforming its order according to his own best ideal of its functions, where he would have had to suffer the heel of authority to plant itself on his mind and conscience, and trample on his own intelligence and his own convictions.

But there was in the polity of the English Church, even at its best, inherent in it and inseparable from it, what Milton had long regarded with growing disfavour. His aversion to Prelacy goes back to his early manhood. It had a pomp and a pride which he felt to be contrary to the spirit of the Gospel and the simplicity of Christ.

In his Church polemics this is one of the points on which he directs his fiercest attacks.

Milton's university life did a great deal to cool his attachment to the Church and turn away his mind from holy orders. His acquaintance with the young divines among his fellow-students lessened his esteem for the clerical office. He never refers to them but in terms of contempt. They were ignorant and indolent. They trifled with learning, and even in theology were content only to pick up as much as sufficed for "anyhow sticking together a little sermon." They were vulgar and frivolous. He had often seen them at dramatic performances, playing the parts of "buffoons and bawds" for the entertainment of courtiers and their ladies, their grooms and their maids—"while they acted and overacted, among other young scholars I was a spectator. They thought themselves gallant men and I thought them fools: they made sport and I laughed: they mispronounced and I misliked: and to make up the Atticism they were out and I hissed." Long before entering on the controversial period of his life and publishing his succession of diatribes on the Clergy, he had written of them in terms of unmeasured scorn. There is nothing more stinging in his prose works than there is in "Lycidas," which was written only

a few years after he left Cambridge. The prolonged invective of the pamphlets is all compressed into a few lines in his elegy on his college friend, nay, in but one of its epithets—

"Blind mouths!"

with his word of pity for the poor flocks—

"The hungry sheep look up and are not fed."

There is no hint in the record of his life that Milton's abandonment of the Church cost him any painful struggle. It had been so long before his mind as a thing inevitable, that when the moment for decision came, it was done without difficulty or regret. At the same time, he always spoke of it as forced upon him rather than as chosen: he had not left the Church—he had been "outchurched by the Prelates."

How shall we express the loss the English Church sustained when Milton renounced her service? If pure and lofty character, a spirit untamed to the world, depth and energy of conviction, a passion for the spiritual service of men, an ample endowment of learning and eloquence —if these constitute fitness for the office of the ministry, who was more obviously called to it than he? He was as one separated to it from

the womb. The words he puts into the mouth of Christ in "Paradise Regained" were not without good reason inscribed beneath Cypriani's etching from the original portrait of himself when he was a boy of ten:—

> "When I was yet a child, no childish play
> To me was pleasing, all my mind was set
> Serious to learn and know, and thence to do
> What might be public good: myself I thought
> Born to that end, born to promote all truth,
> All righteous things."

He passed a stainless youth: purity was his gallantry. The honourable hesitations that rose in his mind in regard to the ministry were not the least proof of his fitness for it. The high conscientiousness he showed in this matter was habitual. He could take no step in life till he had the clear sanction of that inward voice which echoes the voice of the Highest. There is a letter he wrote to a friend, who, about the time he was leaving Cambridge, had remonstrated with him on his dilatoriness in choosing a profession, which is valuable as an illustration of this quality in his character. He was grateful, he said to his friend, for admonishing him like a good watchman that the hours of the night were passing, and that the day was at hand with him wherein Christ commanded all to labour while there was light:

but he had reasons for his tardy moving, which he was assured were in accordance with his conscience, and, he firmly trusted, with the will of God. It was not his love of learning that was at fault: he was not dreaming away his life in studious retirement; he was not anxious to hide his talent; but he had to take care not only that he should not enter on his life-work too late, but also that he should not begin it too soon and before he was fit for it. With the letter he sent a copy of his Sonnet, "On his being arrived at the Age of Twenty-three." The thought contained in the great line with which the sonnet closes—

"As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye,"

or, as the Hebrew prophet expressed it—"God before whom I stand"—is one of frequent recurrence in Milton's writings, and the expression he gives to it is always as remarkable. His infinite fear was lest he should disobey the will of the Highest. Was not this the secret of that absence of self-reproach in Milton on which we have remarked in the previous chapter? Before entering on his actions, he so practised his imagination on the pains of penitence should he offend the Supreme eye, that he was preserved from wrong-doing, and so had never actually to endure them. "Were it the meanest under service," he says in

one of his pamphlets, "if God, by His secretary, Conscience, enjoins it, it were sad if I should draw back. When God commands to take the trumpet and blow a dolorous or jarring blast, it lies not in man's will what he shall say or what he shall conceal. Those sharp but saving words would be a terror and a torment in him to keep back." If Milton had taken orders, it would not have been only by his genius that he would have adorned the Church. He would have brought to her service a quality even more honourable, if not so rare: there would not have been in the ranks of her clergy one whose diligence in his cure and faithfulness in the humblest duties would have shamed him by comparison. There are notes of the Christian life, of which the Church has made more. She has made more of the penitential, the confessional, and the devotional. It might have been well if the beatitude for the obedient, for those who "hear the word of God and keep it," had had more of her regard. It would surely be a gain to religion if Milton's type of saintliness were deemed worthier of cultivation than that, say, of Bishop Andrewes.

Of that qualification for the service of the Church which consists in a lofty conception of her functions, no one ever took her orders who had more than Milton. Hildebrand was not more of a

Churchman than he was in his higher fashion. The Church was his first care. When the nation had resolved on her reform, he relinquished, as we have seen, his literary labour to join in the task. How honourable was his motive when he made this choice, we shall let words of his own disclose to us — they occur in his "Reason of Church Government urged against Prelaty," and are perhaps the noblest expression he ever gave of his devotion to the Church:—

"For me, I have determined to lay up as the treasure and solace of a good old age, if God vouchsafe it to me, the honest liberty of speech from my youth, when I shall think it available in so dear a concernment as the Church's good. Thus, I foresee, that should the Church be brought under heavy oppression, and God have given ability the while to reason against that man that should be the author of so foul a deed; or should she, by blessing from above on the industry and courage of faithful men, change this, her distracted state into better days, without the least furtherance or contribution of those few talents which God at that present had lent me; foresee what stories I should hear within myself, all my life, of discourage and reproach. Timorous and ungrateful, the Church of God is now again at the foot of her insulting enemies, and thou

bewailest. What matters it for thee or thy wailing? When time was, thou could'st not find a syllable of all that thou hast read or studied, to utter on her behalf. Yet ease and leisure were given thee for thy retired thoughts, out of the sweat of other men. Thou hast the diligence, the parts, the language of a man, if a vain subject were to be adorned or beautified; but when the cause of God and the Church was to be pleaded, for which purpose that tongue was given thee which thou hast, God listened if He could hear thy voice among His zealous servants, but thou wert dumb as a beast; from henceforward be that which thine own brutish silence hath made thee. Or else, I should have heard on the other ear: Slothful and ever to be set light by, the Church hath now overcome her late distresses after the unwearied labours of many, her true servants, that stood up in her defence; thou would'st take upon thee the share amongst them of their joy; and wherefore thou? When canst thou shew any word or deed of thine which might have hastened her peace? Whatever thou dost now talk or write, or look, is the alms of other men's active prudence and zeal. Dare not now to do anything better than thy former sloth and infancy; or if thou darest, thou dost impudently to make a thrifty purchase of boldness to thyself

out of the painful merits of other men: what was before thy sin is now thy duty, to be abject and worthless. These and such-like lessons as these, I know would have been my matins duly and my evensong. But now, by this little diligence, mark what a privilege I have gained with good men and saints, to claim my right of lamenting the tribulations of the Church, if she should suffer, when others that have ventured nothing for her sake have not the honour to be admitted mourners. But if she lift up her drooping head, among those that have something more than wished her welfare, I have my charter and free-hold of rejoicing to me and my heirs."

Was the service of the Church ever entertained in a more chivalrous spirit?

In which of all the most interior qualities that are required of a true minister was Milton not eminent? In reverence? Who has more proved his reverence, if to stand in awe of the majesty of truth and righteousness, and to be loyal at all cost to his vision of them, be the most real reverence? He was a

> "Soul awful—if the earth has ever lodged
> An awful soul."

In another quality, which, as the very name of the Christian ministry implies, constitutes its

essential character, he was eminent—he held all his powers as gifts for service. It was because he saw so little appreciation in the clergy of his time of the dignity of lowliness, that he regarded them with so little respect. There is no better characterisation of Milton, than that of Wordsworth's sonnet: in its truthfulness, compression, and completeness it is a marvellous piece of work; and there are no lines more just than those with which it closes:—

> "So didst thou travel on life's common way
> In cheerful godliness: and yet thy heart
> The lowliest duties on itself did lay."

For many years he kept a private school, and he was as proud of his charge of his pupils as any king is of his kingdom. When he became Latin Secretary to the Republic, he sat as contentedly at his desk in Whitehall, discharging the dull routine of his office, as though his pen had never tasted nobler quarry. He sought no place, he coveted no honours at the hands of the Government which owed so much to his powerful support. He says of himself that he never "solicited greatness," nor was he ever seen "supplicating at the door of the senate, or the levees of the rich."

What was most remarkable in Milton's piety, when we remember the energy and impetuosity

of his temperament, was his submissiveness under calamities. Of these, he had more than most men, and some of them were of the bitterest. Till he reached mid-years, his life was singularly peaceful; it was like a sunny morning without a cloud in the sky; but after the noon was passed, clouds began to gather, which never lifted, but only grew darker to the close. The first stroke of evil fortune, leaving a wound that never healed, was his unhappy marriage; he lost his eyesight when he was at his prime; and—most cruel fate of all for such a spirit—he saw the dearest ambitions of his life and all that he had spent his genius and the industry of his best years in accomplishing, scattered to the winds, his honour turned into reproach, his name and fame prostrated, and his life stripped of all comfort, save such as is preserved in the inviolable sanctuary of a good conscience. And how did he bear himself under the blows of adversity? That he felt the weight of them, that he felt to the quick those that came upon him through the unworthiness or folly of others, that he was perplexed by the Providence which seems to bring just and unjust alike to an evil end, need not be said. But all his references to his misfortunes have two characteristics. They show that it was not by private but by public loss that he was most

distressed; and that in regard to neither did he indulge a querulous spirit, accounting them rather as a challenge to his soul to prove its virtue. And bravely was the challenge met! Of all his calamities, his blindness was the one in regard to which he most discloses his feelings, and with what cheerful fortitude he bore it! "It was not miserable," he said, "to be blind; the misery would be not to be able to endure blindness: he might oftener think of what God had bestowed than of what He had withheld. God seemed to regard him with the more tenderness that he was able to behold nothing but Himself. This obscurity was not so much due to privation of sight, as to the overshadowing of the heavenly wings; and in it he had the illumination of an interior light, more precious and more pure."

If we turn to Milton's intellectual gifts, these distributed might have furnished a whole province of the clergy. The English Church has never lacked divines endowed with the *os magna soniturum*, but the most eloquent of them was surpassed by the son of the Church who was lost to her ministry through fault of her rulers:—

> "The God-gifted organ voice of England,
> Milton, a name to resound for ages."

The invocations of the Spirit, which we so often meet both in his poetry and his prose, would

have enriched even the Anglican liturgy. There are no prayers in the heritage of the Church that soar higher in pure adoration, or kindle with more seraphic fervour. We can imagine what Milton would have been as a preacher. In our cathedrals, the stateliness and spaciousness of the sanctuary are seldom matched by the language of the pulpit; but who would have felt a disparity in listening to the heavenly eloquence of Milton's periods?

In declining the official service of the Church, Milton was liberated to serve her in a loftier, wider, and more enduring way. The loss to the Church was a gain to religion and mankind. He laboured for the ends for which the Church exists in his prose writings. He rendered still more illustrious service when he resumed his "singing-robes." That he did not transfer his service from religion, but only gave it a higher consecration, no one was more conscious than himself. There is a passage in his "Reason of Church Government," in which he dilates on the good offices which literature, and especially poetry, renders to religion, and every line of it reflects the lofty satisfaction with which he regarded, from this point of view, his own literary labour:—

"These abilities, wheresoever they be found,

are the inspired gift of God, rarely bestowed, but yet to some in every nation; and are of power, beside the office of a pulpit, to imbreed and cherish in a great people the seed of virtue and civility; to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune; to celebrate in glorious hymns the throne and equipage of God's Almightiness, and what He works, and what He suffers to be wrought with high providence in His Church; to sing victorious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious nations, doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ, to deplore the general relapses of kingdoms and States from justice and God's true worship. Lastly, whatsoever in religion is holy and sublime, in virtue, amiable or grave, whatsoever hath passion or admiration in all the changes of that which is called fortune from without, or the wily subtleties and refluxes of man's thoughts from within; all these things with a solid and treatable smoothness to paint out and describe. Teaching over the whole book of sanctity and virtue, through all the instances of example, with such delight, to those especially of soft and delicious temper, who will not so much as look upon truth herself, unless they see her elegantly dressed; that whereas the paths of honesty and good life appear now

rugged and difficult, though they be indeed easy and pleasant, they will then appear to all men both easy and pleasant, though they were rugged and difficult indeed."

The most distinguished services to Christianity in every age have been rendered by men who were "out-churched," and Milton is the most eminent instance in his time. It is a saying of Edward Irving, when commenting on the flight of the infant Saviour with His parents into Egypt, that whenever Christ is born afresh anywhere, He has to take refuge in foreign parts.

We know how Milton flitted from Episcopacy to Presbytery, and from Presbytery to Independency, and from Independency to something like Quakerism, and how he finally became "a party by himself," ceasing to value religious organisations and a regular ministry, and advocating the spirituality of religion in its extremest degree. It is easy to see how inevitable to such a spirit was his gravitation towards the eternal elements in religion, so pure were his Christian ideals, and so confident was he of the power of their unaided appeal to the soul of man. Never did anyone believe more fervently that it is only in the climate of liberty that these ideals can be brought to their fruition.

CHAPTER IV

MILTON, THE FRIEND OF LIBERTY: HIS DOCTRINE OF LIBERTY

MILTON'S early purpose had been to take orders in the English Church; but he had been destined to a ministry of a more comprehensive kind. It was at the altar of liberty he proved himself a dedicated spirit—it was to the service of liberty he had been bound,

> "As by some tie invisible, oaths professed
> To a religious order."

The exaltation of liberty was his *unum ago.* With his right hand and his left, by his poetry and his prose, he laboured in it. That his vision was as remarkable as his zeal, will appear when we study the content of liberty as he conceived it—the ideals which, for him, it comprehended, and by which he was commanded.

Liberty has many provinces. Of Milton, it may be freely said that he served her in all of them without partiality. Wherever her dominion

was invaded, he stood forth in her defence. He fought for civil liberty against the absolutism of the throne, for ecclesiastical liberty against the domination of the bishops, for liberty of conscience against the intolerance of the Presbyterians, for theological liberty against the bondage of creeds, for liberty of the press against the censorship, for domestic liberty against the existing marriage laws, for liberty in education against the tyranny of custom, and—to give a curious completeness to his vocation as the knight-errant of liberty, he cast off the shackles of tradition in his own art—he "set the example, first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to Heroic Poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of Rimeing."

At the outbreak of the Civil War, when Charles I. came to a rupture with the Scots over the bishops in the summer of 1639, Milton was in Italy. When the news reached him, he resolved to return at once to England. "I considered it disgraceful, that while my countrymen were fighting at home for liberty, I should be travelling abroad for intellectual purposes." Such was the chivalrous spirit with which he entered into the struggle of the nation for freedom, and he maintained the same spirit through all its varying fortunes to the close. Defeat only provoked his

courage: the face of liberty was never more beautiful to her sworn knight than when she was bound in the hands of her enemies. And as no discomfiture disheartened him, so no victory satisfied him—so many more remained to be won.

In the "Areopagitica," Milton describes in glowing words the literary industry which, during the Civil War, was engaged in fashioning arguments for the defence of liberty, while arms were being forged for her forces on the field. "Behold in this vast city, the mansion-house of liberty, the shop of war hath not more anvils and hammers working to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed justice in defence of beleaguered truth than there are pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas, wherewith to present as with their homage and fealty the approaching Reformation; others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reasoning and convincement." Of this auxiliary army, Milton was the Chief. He was as unrivalled a controversialist as Cromwell was a soldier; and in the hazards he ran, and the valour he displayed, as heroic. It was his genius that furnished the ammunition for the conquest of the mind of England.

Milton's controversial writings cover the entire period between the beginning of the Civil War and the Restoration, and their sequence was decided by the need of the hour. So it was that those on Civil Liberty were the latest. They belong to the period after the downfall of the Monarchy. While this kind of liberty had so many able defenders in Parliament and the Army, he gave his help to others that had fewer champions. He did not sit down to compose leisurely treatises, but to furnish weapons for immediate use. Where liberty was weakest, thither he transferred his labours. Besides, while he might have his own ideas as to the relative value of different species of liberty, no man has perceived more than he that they are all vitally bound up with one another. They are "like Hippocrates' twins, they weep or laugh, they live or die together." It is rarely we find in history one who has been so catholic in his conceptions of liberty, and so friendly to its development on every side of human life. How often have those who have advanced freedom in certain directions obstructed it in others! But for a singular solecism in his writings—his teaching on the subjection of women—the integrity of Milton's sympathy with freedom was perfect.

In the political polemics of every period

there is much of the reasoning that from many causes passes away with the occasion. Milton's writings contain their proportion of this ephemeral matter; but when it has been deducted there remains an imperishable residuum. The pamphlets abound in pages of undying literary splendour; the ideals of a State which they present, set an enduring mark and lure to nations; and there is a contagiousness in the spirit of the writer which is their most vital quality. The greatest service any man can render to liberty was conspicuously rendered by Milton in the example he gave in his own life of entire trust in her guidance. His self-committal to liberty was without hesitation and without reserve.

To appreciate Milton's doctrine of liberty, we must keep in view what has been said as to the large conception he had of the content of liberty. It took in the totality of the national life; it regarded the nation as existing for moral and not mere economic ends. Milton was born into a time when this ideal took possession of the English people, when the tidal wave of national aspiration set strongly in the direction of moral good; and there was no one who caught up into his own spirit more of the spirit of his time. He was not insensible to the lustre that had been added to the English name in "the spacious times

of great Elizabeth." He could admire the enterprise and the heroism of his countrymen who had ventured through unknown seas to untouched shores, tempted by visions of new lands and treasures of silver and gold. Nor was there anyone in the nation whose heart thrilled with more pride and delight in the new realms of imagination with which the illustrious groups of geniuses, to which that age gave birth, enriched our literature. But his ambition for his country soared to loftier and purer heights: he sought for her a rarer and a more enduring fame. He would have England seek "precedence in teaching nations how to live." That this was the *rôle* Providence had assigned to her, Milton believed as firmly as any Hebrew believed it of his nation. "There was," he says of his time, "a concurrence of signs, a general instinct of holy and devout men," that they were on the eve of a new Reformation. God was revealing Himself to men—and "as His manner was, first to His Englishmen." Of this Reformation, Milton was a chief apostle. The precedence which he claimed for Englishmen among other nations may be truly claimed for himself among Englishmen. "Better than any other, he has discharged the office of every great man, namely, to raise the idea of man in the minds of his contemporaries and of posterity. Human

nature in these ages is indebted to him for its best portrait. Many philosophers in England, France and Germany have formally dedicated their study to this problem; and we think it impossible to recall one in those countries who communicates this same vibration of hope, of self-reverence, of piety, of delight in beauty, which the name of Milton awakens. The idea of a purer existence than any he saw around him, to be realised in the life and conversation of men, inspired every act and every writing of John Milton.[1]

It was as the necessary condition for the growth of virtue that Milton set so high a value on liberty. In his conception, the two were coupled and inseparable. They are distinguishable in thought, but they have a common measure in the actual life. Real liberty is always interior in its source. It is the product of virtue. It consists in the free movement of a healthy moral life. If a man has not the love of virtue in his soul, he cannot taste liberty. He may be free from all outward restraints, but he will play the tyrant over himself. If he loves virtue, he will have a native strength by which he will resist and overcome external tyranny. Liberty has a law. Its law is duty. Only when obedience is perfect, is

[1] Emerson.

liberty complete. Then (to use the words of Virgil's farewell to Dante on the threshold of the Earthly Paradise when the discipline of Purgatory was finished) "thou mayest take pleasure for thy guide: forth art thou from the steep ways, forth from the narrow. Free, upright and whole is thy will, and 'twere a fault not to act according to its promptings. I crown and mitre thee over thyself." While liberty is the keynote of Milton's prose works, obedience is that of his epics. But in the exaltation of the one there is no lowering of the other. They are co-efficients.

Of no phase of liberty did Milton write with such a glow as of that which makes it the correlative of virtue. This idea is one of the great recurrences alike in his poems and his prose works. It is the regnant idea of "Paradise Lost." Through man's original lapse, true liberty was lost,

> "which always with right reason dwells
> Twinned, and from her hath no dividual being."

It is the theme of "Comus," in whose closing words he gives it a magnificence of expression that lodges it imperishably in the ear:—

> "Mortals that would follow me
> Love virtue, she alone is free.
> She can teach ye how to climb
> Higher than the sphery clime,
> Or if virtue feeble were
> Heaven itself would stoop to her."

In his prose writings, it is the same subject on which he is most reiterative. "Virtue is the only source of liberty;" "only good men can love liberty;" "to be free is the same thing as to be pious"—in these and many more like sayings he put the stamp of his genius and his faith on this golden truth. No man in England was less under the imagination that the real liberty of the nation was secured merely by the overthrow of the monarchy and the setting up of the Republic in its room. In his "Defensio Secunda" there is no passage in which he wrote at such a white heat of appeal as in that, at the close, when he implores his fellow-citizens who had recovered their constitutional freedom, to make sure of its retention, by "rooting deep in their minds that liberty which is of such a kind as arms can neither procure nor take away, which alone is the fruit of piety, of justice, of temperance, and of unadulterated virtue."

Milton's concern for this supreme principle—namely, that real freedom could be found only within the bounds of moral law, did not make him contend less strenuously for the inferior freedom which consists in liberation from arbitrary interferences with self-development. On the contrary, it only made him the more zealous in promoting it. It was vital to his doctrine that

to live virtuously a people are bound to protect themselves from all kinds of tyranny. To submit to the thraldom of kings or priests, or to the dead weight of customs and traditions, is to disregard that inner authority to which men owe their first allegiance, and is a renunciation of that struggle of the soul to follow its purest vision of truth and duty in which virtue consists. For moral vigour there must be the largest possible scope for the exercise of the affections and faculties that fashion life. It was that every one might grow "to the full stature of an honest man," that Milton was such an incessant assailant of all the tyrannies that beset human life. To impose restrictive laws wantonly, or with a narrow conception of human freedom, was, in his estimation, one of the worst, as it was one of the commonest, follies of governments. "Mark this," he says, "judges and law-givers, and ye whose office it is to be our teachers, for I will utter now a doctrine, if ever any other, though neglected or not understood, yet of great and powerful importance to the governing of mankind. He who would wisely restrain the reasonable soul of man within due bounds must first himself know perfectly how far the territory and dominion extends of just and honest liberty. The ignorance and mistake of this high point

hath heaped up one huge half of all the misery that hath been since Adam." The end of all wise government is to render itself unnecessary, and all its methods will be guided by the desire to elicit the individual virtue of its subjects, and to develop the moral manhood of the nation in the greatest possible measure.

CHAPTER V

MILTON AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

In all that Milton wrote in vindication of liberty his primary argument never changes. The argument is, that the wider the bounds of freedom are stretched, the stronger and the richer will be the moral life of the community. Liberty repressed in any sphere is so much virtue lost, so much moral health and vigour checked. Authority, when it is wise, will exercise a severe repression on itself, and rejoice in the contraction of its territory.

In his various pamphlets Milton applied these principles to the whole structure of the national life. He employed them to demolish every restriction on a reasonable freedom. He began with religious liberty; and on this subject he wrote much and wrote vehemently. It is the source of every kind of liberty. It is like spring going before their steps. It creates the atmosphere in which they flourish. There is, therefore, no freedom that should be more jealously guarded than religious freedom. Much

as Milton resented the tyranny of the King, he much more resented the tyranny of the prelates. It is seldom he relents in his invective against the King, but when he does relent, it is to reproach the bishops as his tutors in tyranny. There had been no mischief in the State but the bishops' foot had been in it. They suppressed freedom in its native sphere—in religion—and so aided and abetted its suppression in every other.

There were four features of the ecclesiastical system of which the bishops were the head, by which it violated liberty, denied the very genius of religion, and correspondingly injured the spiritual life of the people.

(1) One was its incorporation with the State. In Milton's sonnet "To Sir Henry Vane the Younger" these are the closing lines:

"besides, to know
Both spiritual power and civil, what each means,
What severs each, thou hast learned, which few have done.
The bounds of either sword to thee we owe:
Therefore on thy firm hand Religion leans
In peace, and reckons thee her eldest son."

That this distinction of jurisdiction had not been more widely recognised never ceased to astonish Milton, it was so axiomatic. The intrusion of the civil authority in religion was a usurpation which the Church, as a society

constituted on a purely spiritual basis, was bound to repel. It lowered the invisible authority, to maintain which is the *raison d'être* of the Church. It affronted that authority by supplementing it with the sanctions of human law. It implied, in those who approved of it, a lack of that trust in the sovereignty of the truth, and in the power of its unaided appeal to the conscience and spirit of man, which is the breath of the Church's life. To invoke the aid of the State in support of religion was not to reinforce but weaken its own proper power. "What minister or clergyman that either understood his high calling, or sought not to erect a secular and carnal tyranny over spiritual things, would neglect this ample and sublime power, and come a-begging to the weak hand of magistracy for that kind of aid, which the magistrate hath no commission to afford him, and in the way he seeks it, hath been always found helpless and unprofitable?" There was no reform more urged by Milton than the separation of Church and State. If ever he gave signs of impatience with Cromwell, it was at the slow movement of his policy in this direction. In his own estimation Disestablishment had the first claim on the statesmanship of the new era.

(2) The absolute rule of the bishops was a second

feature. It deprived the people of all power in the government of the Church, and of all opportunity of exercising their intelligence and interest regarding its affairs. Here again the injury to life, through the injury to liberty, was apparent. Nothing so elevates a people as to be entrusted with high duties. The Church is an institution which will do most for the people when they do most for it. Its burdens are its privileges. Episcopacy, by denying to the people the ennobling responsibilities that attach to the care of the Church, immeasurably impoverishes their spiritual life.

(3) A third feature was sacerdotalism. The more institutional ritual and intermediary worship and other religious acts are made, the less is their value as an expression of devotion, and the feebler is their reflex moral influence. So long as the ministers of religion regard their offices as subsidiary and auxiliary they may be allowed, but when they pretend to be the necessary dispensers of grace, when they assume the character of factors for the people in the conduct of their religion, they are to be repudiated as barriers in the way of that immediate communion between the soul and God, which lifts man up to the dignity of spiritual being and is the very nerve of the spiritual life.

A fourth feature was the imposition of creeds. What should those who desire to promote religion be more eager to encourage than individual enquiry regarding truth? But instead of encouraging it, the rulers of the Church laid an interdict on it. They stifled the voice of that inward oracle, the spirit of truth, which dwells in pure hearts, and guides them into all truth. The best knowledge of God is always first hand. It is derived straight from the light of lights. The power to confer it is never deputed. And no truth is truth to him who accepts it in mere submission to authority, and does not make it his own by personal conviction. "The pursuit of truth," says a recent writer,[1] "is a high endeavour in which no fellow-mortal can be more to us than our brother. . . . Higher position is not to be granted to any man, higher position should no man accept. . . . Even to the weakest and most ignorant the strongest and wisest may assume no other attitude. To learn that no place or power, no eminence in Church or State, no equipment of learning or natural ability can confer the right to treat the humblest disciple of the Master as other than our fellow-scholar, is to understand the Master's method of truth. It is to discover to what

[1] Prof. Oman in "Vision and Authority."

insight in man he reveals truth, and by what dignity in man he demonstrates it."

At first, and so long as Presbytery was in opposition in the Parliament, Milton looked on it as a substitute for Prelacy, with at least a tepid approval; but when it came into power, and had the opportunity of putting its own discipline into operation, he turned away from it and denounced it as fiercely as Prelacy. With more moderate pretensions and more popular sympathies in political affairs, it was in the same condemnation, as a system protected by the State and opposed to toleration. Its rigour was as unpalatable to him as the assumptions of Prelacy. There was even more acridity in his anti-Presbyterian than in his anti-Prelatical writings. This appears in his two sonnets, "On the Detraction which Followed on My Writing Certain Treatises," and "On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament," in the pamphlets he published during the Presbyterian ascendency, and still more in those that appeared during the Commonwealth, when the Presbyterians were again in opposition—but, this time, to the friends of liberty. While he was embittered against them by a personal quarrel, by the storm the Westminster divines raised over his "Divorce Tracts," it was on public

grounds that he assailed them with such vehemence. We can easily understand how, to a mind so opposed to accommodations and compromises, their conduct should have been odious, and how he could never forgive them for having blasted, by their temporising and selfish policy, the fair prospect that had opened in England of a free Church in a free State.

Even among the Independents Milton came to be as an advanced outpost, pushing beyond them all in his advocacy of toleration and the severance of the jurisdiction of Church and State.

There is no sphere in which Milton's ideals of liberty have advanced more slowly to recognition than in the Church. It might have been expected that here controversy would have been antique. The ideals are so accordant with the genius of Christianity, that she might justly use of the Church the words of the Saviour to a disciple—"Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me?"

CHAPTER VI

MILTON AND "DOMESTIC" LIBERTY: MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE; EDUCATION; THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS—"AREOPAGITICA"

MILTON'S five pamphlets in defence of religious liberty, as enumerated in the introduction, were all published before the year 1643. In mid-summer of that year he was married to Mary Powell: and his marriage was the opening of a new chapter in his public as well as his private life. It brought him into a fresh field, where he did battle for what he clumsily terms "domestic liberty" in his four "Divorce Tracts," his "Letter on Education," and "Areopagitica."

I.—MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

The occasion of his writings on this subject was his desertion by his wife within a few weeks of their wedding-day. In none of them does he make any reference to his personal stake in the question he discusses, but they contain passages

which, without doubt, form an apology for his marriage and also for his desire to be freed from it. He had been to blame, he allows, for making so hasty a choice, but his error, he pleads, was one into which the most virtuous and ingenuous men are apt to fall. He says with great *naïveté*, "The soberest and best governed men are least practised in these affairs: and who knows not that the bashful muteness of a virgin may oftentimes hide all the unliveliness and natural sloth which is really unfit for conversation? Nor is there that freedom of access as may suffice to a perfect discerning till too late: and when any indisposition is suspected, what more usual than the persuasion of friends that acquaintance as it increases, will amend all? And it is not strange, though many who have spent youth chastely are in some things not quite so quick-sighted, while they haste eagerly to light the nuptial torch; nor is it, therefore, that for a modest error, a man should forfeit so great a happiness, and no charitable means to release him, since they who have lived most loosely by reason of their bold accustoming, prove most successful in their matches, because their wild affections unsettling at will, have been so many divorces to teach them experience."

In the "Defensio Secunda," he discloses the

acute difference that brought the incompatibility between him and his wife to a head, and led to the rupture of their union. He says that at that time "man and wife were often the most inveterate foes: the man often stayed to take care of his children at home, while the mother of the family was seen in the camp, threatening death and destruction to her husband." Mary Powell's Royalist sympathies, though not carrying her to such lengths, had at least led her to desert her home. Milton's impatience to be absolved from the tie which she had renounced by this act, need excite no surprise. His whole conduct as a husband was honourable, and nothing could have been more generous than his treatment of his wife and her parents when she returned to her home.

How painfully the subject had worked on his mind, and how deep the iron had entered his soul, is shown by the stock of epithets by which he describes a luckless marriage. They exhaust the language of lamentation. An ill-matched pair, but "fadged together and combined to their unspeakable weariness and despair of all sociable delight." They changed "the blessing of matrimony into a familiar and cohabiting mischief; at least into a drooping and disconsolate household captivity without refuge or redemption."

Man and wife, when of incompatible temper, are "as deadly enemies shut up together in a cage." The best natures were those that suffered most. "No man knows hell like he who communes most in heaven: so that there is none that can estimate the evil and the affliction of a natural hatred in matrimony, unless he have a soul gentle enough and spacious enough to contemplate what is true love."

Milton had persuaded himself that no more necessary service could be rendered to social wellbeing, than the facilitation of divorce. To bring about such a relaxation in the law as would enable an ill-coupled pair to obtain release from each other, would be a service of consolation to a vast constituency. "I doubt not," he said, "but with one gentle stroke to wipe away ten thousand tears."

The relaxation for which Milton argues is of the widest kind. A man should be allowed to put away his wife without recourse to law. The wife's consent is desirable, but should not be indispensable. The economic difficulties arising out of divorce, for which it is the business of legislation to provide, Milton hardly even glances at. This was characteristic. He was always peremptory in his idealism. All that he has to say regarding the injury which free divorce

might in many cases inflict on the woman, especially when there were children, is that, at the worst, it could not be so great an evil as the continuance of the marriage bond where law only held it together. Nothing can be more intolerable to a good woman than to be bound to a man by a tie that is only legal, or more hurtful to children than to be brought up in a home where there is perpetual strife between their parents.

Milton always assumes that it is on the man that the yoke of the marriage laws lies heaviest; and it is mainly in the interests of the man that he argues for free divorce. We cannot suppose he believed that the failure of marriage is never due to the man, that it is always the fault of the woman. But he did believe that an injured husband had a greater claim to consideration than an injured wife. He never concealed his opinion as to the inferiority of woman. "Man is for God only—woman for God in him," or, as Eve addressing Adam expresses it in "Paradise Lost" — "God is thy law — thou mine"— that was Milton's creed. The scriptural arguments with which he supports it are difficult to take as serious. They are a notable instance of the accessions of weakness to which the most powerful minds are subject. It is consoling to

common mortals to find to what depths of ineptness genius can sometimes sink. Literalism in the interpretation of Scripture is the frequent object of Milton's scorn; and no one has penetrated more into the inward spiritual genius of Christianity: but on this subject he falls into the worst literalism himself. He argues, for example, that the words in Genesis—"in the image of God created he him;" would have been—"in the image of God created he them," had woman fully shared man's dignity of nature; and he gives as a plea for polygamy that it was "the practice of the saints" in the Old Testament! It is difficult to believe one's eyes when we meet in the pages of Milton an argument like the following:—"Solomon saith that a bad wife is to her husband as rottenness to his bones, a continual dropping. Better dwell in the corner of a house-top or in the wilderness than with such a one. Whoso hideth her, hideth the wind, and one of the four mischiefs which the earth cannot bear. If the Spirit of God wrote such aggravations as these, and (as may be guessed from those similitudes) counsels the man rather to divorce than to live with such a colleague: and yet on the other side expresses nothing of the wife's suffering with a bad husband; is it not most likely that God, in His law, had more

pity towards man thus wedlocked, than towards the woman that was created for another?"

Sometimes Milton modifies his teaching. He allows that in particular cases, when the woman may exceed her husband in wisdom, and when he contentedly yields, she should rule by virtue of the superior and more natural law that the wiser should govern, whether male or female. And while he insists on the subjection of woman, he softens the rigour of his doctrine by granting her a claim to some share in man's dominion. She was not "to be held as a servant, but to be received into a part, though not an equal part, of the empire God proclaimed him to." But the "little less" made a great difference. While woman was made for marriage, marriage was made for man, and he has therefore a greater right to be released from marriage when it is unhappy.

It will be thought strange to assert, in face of these opinions of Milton, that he presents in his "Divorce Tracts" a noble ideal of marriage: and yet it is true. He insists that it is essentially a spiritual union, and he has no tolerance for any lower conception of it. It exists to promote sanctity of life and sweet converse between man and woman. They are to love each other "to the higth of dearness," to share each other's

highest thoughts, purest aspirations, and noblest hopes. Where there is no spiritual congeniality, there is no real marriage. In such a case, it is not the dissolution of the bond, but its maintenance that violates the divine law. All the tragedy there was in Milton's life—and there was much—was due to his lofty conception of life in all its relations. He suffered from *la maladie de l'idéal.* This was peculiarly true of him as the husband of Mary Powell. The humiliations and misery he endured in his enforced wedlock with a woman of so opposite a nature was but the inverse measure of the "sociable delight" of which he was capable in a union with one of congenial spirit, and such as he actually found in his second marriage with Catherine Woodcock. In his sonnet to her—"On his Deceased Wife"—there is a depth of passion which reminds us of the noblest instance of a man's love for a woman of which we have record—it recalls the love of Dante for Beatrice:—

"Methinks, I saw my late espoused saint
Brought to me, like Alcestes from the grave.
. . . . . .
And such, as yet once more I trust to have
Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint,
Came vested all in white, pure as her mind;
Her face was veil'd, yet to my fancied sight

> Love, sweetness, goodness in her person shined
> So clear as in no face with more delight.
> But oh! as to embrace me she inclined,
> I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night."

Throughout the whole of his "Divorce Tracts," the argument is still the same as in everything he wrote in the interests of liberty—namely, that liberty is necessary to a vigorous and abundant life. The relation between a husband and wife can only come to its best when they are knit together by unity of spirit and live freely in each other's lives.

The question Milton discusses is a perplexed one: and it cannot be said that he has helped much in its solution. But it can be said that he has left such a portrait of true marriage, that the society which keeps it before its eye will always have with it an influence beyond all that law can reach for preserving the purity and honour of a relationship which lies so near the springs of human wellbeing.

II.—Milton on Education

In his letter to Samuel Hartlib, published in June 1644, Milton applies his principle of the correlation of liberty and efficiency to the question of education. He had bestowed much thought on this subject: teaching was his own profession:

and he followed the methods he commends in this letter with his own pupils as far as possible. In his opinion the educational system of the country, alike in schools and universities, was notoriously inefficient and in need of reform. It was wrong from the foundation, proceeding as it did on an erroneous conception of the ends of education. It aimed at producing scholarship—the true end of education is to develop manhood. "I call a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war." To accord with this ideal it is necessary to make learning vital, and to value it only as it enriches life. Was this the kind of learning which the education of the time was promoting? It was the opposite. The Latin and Greek tongues were the principal subjects taught in the schools and universities; and they were used not to enrich the mind with the treasures of their literature, but for the syntax—to make grammarians rather than wise, virtuous, and spirited citizens. In teaching a language the scholar should be enticed to read in it for the sake of its classics. In the schools of England this primary aim was disregarded. Seven or eight years, he says, were spent "in scraping together so much miserable Latin and

Greek as might be learned otherwise, easily and delightfully, in a year; time was lost in a preposterous exaction, forcing the wits of children to compose themes, verses, and orations, which are the work of ripest judgment, and the final work of a head filled with elegant maxims and copious invention. These are not matters to be wrung from poor striplings, like blood out of the nose, or the plucking of untimely fruit." When youths passed from the school to the university they were taught with as little wisdom. Instead of being set, first of all, to the easier branches of knowledge, they were plunged into the "fathomless and unquiet deep of logic and metaphysics." Milton proposed to reverse the order of the curriculum so as to adapt it to the growth of their minds, and turn learning from an odious task into a delight. The natural sciences were to come first; and to give zest to the study of these the pupils were to be instructed in their application to practical uses. For this purpose the services of farmers, gardeners, architects, engineers, and other experts were to be requisitioned. To give additional relish to their work the youths were to be encouraged to read the "rural parts" of classic poetry. Ethical studies were to follow, embracing the laws of personal conduct as treated in the moral works of the

ancients and the Christian Scriptures, the affairs of the household and the domestic relations, with the part they play in life, as illustrated in the great classic dramas, political science, the principle of jurisprudence, ecclesiastical history, and theology. The great literature of the world, its books of "fadeless fame," epics and dramas and histories were to form the next subject of study. Thus furnished and inspired, youths might attempt authorship and public speech. Recreation was not omitted in the programme. It provides for athletic exercises and military training. It embraces, also, culture in music, that with its "solemn and divine harmonies" the scholars might "recreate and compose their travailed spirits." When the spring days returned, and in summer, they were to close their books and live in the open air; it is "an injury and a sullenness against nature, not to go out and see her riches, and partake in her rejoicing with heaven and earth."

Milton never wrote anything more characteristic than his "Letter on Education." Once he had conceived an ideal in life, he gave himself no concern about the difficulties in the way of its attainment. He had a boundless faith in the practicableness of the best. Anything inferior, anything in the way of makeshift, would, he

was persuaded, prove in the long run more Utopian. It was this noble assumption that made him heedless of all criticism directed against the realisableness of his ideals rather than against their truth. He was not blind to the severe demands his scheme of education would make on scholars and teachers alike. "It was not," as he said, "a bow for any man to shoot in": it would require "sinews almost equal to those which Homer gave to Ulysses." But he had a generous confidence in the youth of England, and he believed the new education would prove much easier than it seemed. He compares it to "a hillside, laborious indeed at the first ascent, but else so smooth, so green, so full of goodly prospect and melodious sounds on every side, that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming." It would be harder "to keep the dullest and slowest of the youth away from such a happy nurture than it was now to hale and drag the choicest of them to that feast of sow-thistles and brambles," of which the existing education was made up. Neither in this nor in any other of the reforms for which he contended, did Milton, even for a moment, allow a cold calculation of the spirit or capacity of his contemporaries to abate his fervour in advocating them.

Let it be noted that the principle that dominated his teaching here as elsewhere is, that freedom is necessary to energetic life—which in this instance means that learning, to be of any value, must be made a delight to the scholar, and if a labour, a labour of love.

III.—The Freedom of the Press—"Areopagitica"

The "Areopagitica" rose out of the divorce controversy. The "Tract on the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce" roused the fierce hostility of the Presbyterians; and their divines in the Westminster Assembly denounced it to the Parliament. A committee was appointed to consider the lax condition of the censorship of the Press; and it was to move the Parliament, instead of passing more rigorous laws on the subject, to repeal the existing ones, that the "Areopagitica" was written. Of all Milton's prose works it has the most sustained eloquence and dignity; unlike the others in which occasional soarings from the flats of controversy are soon followed by a drop into the same dull region, it maintains a lofty flight throughout; neither has it any of the vituperative violence which mars so many of their pages; the author uses every province of his learning to enrich the

argument, he bends his bow with all the strength of his arm; there is a variety and a vivacity, there are sallies of wit, which bear the reader along without any feeling of fatigue; and the reasoning, in its sanity and its trenchancy, makes it the final word on this question and closes the controversy beyond reversal or revisal.

It is superfluous to recall the argument of the "Areopagitica" for its own sake, it is now so universally adopted. But it is of great value and interest as illustrating Milton's passion for liberty, and his confidence in liberty, as the necessary condition of human progress in every sphere. The free expression of thought was to him the dearest of liberties. "Give me," he said, "the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely, according to conscience, above all liberties."

Parliament had sought to abolish the bishops and recommit the care of religion to the people themselves. But if it set up such a censorship of books as was proposed, what would it be doing but re-establishing the old tyranny in a new form? It would but be to transfer to another kind of factorship the highest business of life, and the one which can least be devolved by any man upon his fellow.

Before coming to close grips with the enemy Milton spends some time in skirmishing. The

pedigree of the censorship should have made it suspect, he argues, originating as it did with the Council of Trent and the Spanish Inquisition.

It might be said, however, that though its source was bad, the thing itself might be good: and so he proceeds to examine it.

Were it a desirable office, where are we to find our censor? Where are the minds endowed with the grace of inerrancy, with the celestial temper of Ithuriel's spear, whose detection nothing that is false or impure can escape?

But is it a desirable office? Its promoters contended that it would give protection to truth and virtue. Milton argues a direct contrary that it would be injurious to both.

The centre of the argument of the "Areopagitica"—the ground where Milton plants his standard of battle—is the indispensableness of freedom alike to intellectual and moral health and wealth.

Licensing cannot be in the interests of truth, since it is a suppression of the means by which truth is discovered and its realm enlarged. Opinion is but knowledge in the making. To restrict its expression is to staunch knowledge at its spring. To prohibit free publication is to arrest speculation and blight intellectual fertility.

Every new truth has to create its own atmo-

sphere—it has to kindle the light by which it is recognised. The more momentous it is, the less chance it has of an immediate welcome. The greatest, the most original minds, are those whose productions are most likely to encounter prejudice, and to be strangled by the censor at their birth.

In at least the highest commerce—the commerce of thoughts and ideas—Milton was an apostle of free trade. He resisted every kind of tariff on knowledge. They hinder and retard "the importation of our highest merchandise—the truth."

It is but putting the same argument in another form to say that dissent from received opinion, which those who advise the restriction of the Press regard as a calamity, is rather to be welcomed as a boon. It is to be welcomed, in the first place, as a sign of intellectual activity. It is only by the encounter of opinion that knowledge can be sifted and tested. Milton would have assented to Voltaire's saying—which, indeed, he often repeats in his own way—*Croyez moi l'erreur aussi a son mérite.* Error sharpens the weapons of truth, and exercises the spirit of truth in its discernment and resistance.

Dissent is to be welcomed in the next place as an evidence of intellectual honesty. For this the advocates of repression have no concern, and

conformity, however attained, is the supreme object. They do not see that the great end of the truth is to make the spirit of him that receives it truthful, and that when it fails of this it is no better than error. *There is heresy in the truth.* There is heresy whenever the truth is received on any other ground than personal conviction. Of such heresy all laws that are repressive of dissent are the fruitful source. It is not conformity that is needed in the interests of real unity—unity in the love of the truth—but charity.

There runs through the whole of the "Areopagitica" a high strain of confidence in the inviolability and invincibility of truth. It can suffer ultimately from no man's handling. To show timidity on its behalf, to surround it with safeguards from challenge or criticism, to give it police protection is a pusillanimity impossible to anyone who has ever looked in its face. ("Who knows not that truth is strong next to the Almighty?" Dante in his "Paradiso" ascribes the valour of the soldiers of God to their knowledge of truth. The same thought dominates the "Areopagitica.") Contempt is poured on those—and the ministers of religion are often the worst sinners in this respect—who tremble at the appearance of every new book, and dread the whiff of every new pamphlet, lest the people

should be staggered out of their catechism and Christian walking.

In the interest of virtue, the censorship is an equally foolish device. To remove the matter of sin is to affect a rigour contrary to God and nature, and it is not promoting moral vigour or purity. These are to be attained only by the exercise of the soul in discerning and choosing between good and evil. Virtue is militant, and at once proves and strengthens itself by encounter with temptation. In determining the influence of a book there is always an incalculable factor. It is the character of the reader. A fool will be a fool with the best book; a wise man will make a better use of an idle pamphlet than a fool will do of sacred Scripture. To the pure all things are pure; what is poison to one man may be food to another. Milton says of himself, in another pamphlet, that books by which others had been incited to vice had proved to him spurs to virtue.

> "There is some soul of goodness in things evil
> Would men observingly distil it out."

Milton resembles Dante in the stress he lays on the power of the will that is inclined to good to overcome temptation, and in the absence from his writings of anything like an apologetic tone in regard to moral weakness.

The "Areopagitica" is the noblest vindication of intellectual liberty ever penned. Great in all its qualities, it is greatest because of the faith in truth and free enquiry with which it throbs, and in respect of this, the most forward spirits of every age will find in it the kindlings of a new affection for liberty; and whenever the love of freedom waxes cold, contact with Milton's spirit will be like a live coal from the altar to revive it.

CHAPTER VII

MILTON AND CIVIL LIBERTY; HIS DEFENCE OF THE COMMONWEALTH

MILTON'S chivalry in the cause of liberty showed itself in this among other ways, that he always preferred to assert it at the point where it had the least support from public opinion. The forlorn hope was his choice. And so it was that his writings on civil liberty were among the latest of his prose works. From the time when he began to write on public affairs up to the death of the King in 1649, the friends of civil liberty in the nation were so many and so powerful, that he was left free to use his pen in educating his countrymen in principles of liberty that were not so well understood. The unpopularity of the King made the defence of the former a comparatively easy task. "All men," says Milton, "inveighed against him: all men except court-vassals opposed him and his tyrannical proceedings. The cry was universal." With the King's death a reaction in popular

sentiment set in, and Charles became more powerful in his death than he had ever been in his life: the whole fabric of freedom that had been built up in defiance of his authority was shaken. It was at this critical time for civil liberty that Milton threw himself into its defence. He was the first man in England to announce his acceptance of the Republic, as he was the last to stand by it, when it fell. He welcomed it at its birth; he supported it unswervingly to the end; and when every other friendly voice was silenced in despair, he stood forward and appealed to the nation to save it. Admirable constancy! Let those who least approve his opinions do honour to his chivalry!

Milton's writings on civil liberty are, in substance, an impeachment of the King and a vindication of the Commonwealth. His mind did not naturally incline to monarchical government. It was impatient of titular distinctions and artificial rank. It had no regard for authority that did not rest on superior wisdom and competence. The state of kings, the pomp and pageantry of courts, had no glamour for it. The servility that is bred in the atmosphere of courts was nauseous to his self-respecting spirit. He resented the deference that is paid to a king, and that makes men deaf to the wisest voice

in the realm after the King has spoken. In his introduction to "Eikonoklastes" he says: "No man ever had much honour by writing against a king, as not usually meeting with that kind of argument in such courtly antagonists, which to convince might add to reputation. Kings though most commonly strong in legions are but weak in argument, as they who ever have accustomed from their cradle to use their will as their right hand, their reason alone as their left. Whence, unexpectedly constrained to that kind of combat, they prove but weak and puny adversaries: nevertheless for their sakes who through custom, simplicity, or want of better teaching, have not more seriously considered kings than in the gaudy name of majesty, and admire them and their doings, as if they breathed not the same breath with mortal men, I shall make no scruple to take up the gauntlet, though a king's, on behalf of the liberty of the Commonwealth."

It was not, however, from an anti-monarchical point of view, nor as a political *doctrinaire*, that Milton condemned the government of Charles. Had the monarchy been invested in a reasonable ruler, he would have done nothing to disturb it. It was as a tyrant, and not as a king, that he opposed Charles. It was because "he had trampled on the laws of the nation and given

a shock to its religion, and ruled at his own will and pleasure, and given no ground, either by words or action, to hope better things of him." No one ever held more firmly the democratic principle that the authority of the Government is derived from the people, that a king holds his right to reign at the will of the people, that he may be deposed at their will, however he may govern; and *à fortiori* that he ought to be deposed when he governs tyrannically. Tyranny on the part of the King is as criminal as treason on the part of his subjects. As Milton tersely put it, "what right the King of Spain has to rule in England at all—that and no more had an English king to rule despotically."

Milton was the first apologist of those who were responsible for the trial and execution of Charles. Within a fortnight of the King's death, he published a vindication of their action in his "Tenure of Kings and Magistrates." He calls it "an exalted piece of justice." He speaks of the Council before whom Charles was arraigned as "men of the most worthy and illustrious name," and of its president, John Bradshaw, as "the friend I most revere." Of all his eulogies on the chiefs of the Republic, that on Bradshaw breathes the warmest personal affection, and

there was no one among them to whose character he ascribes such a union of the highest qualities. To have had his name wreathed with such tributes as it receives from Milton's pen, may well lift it above the odium which has attached to him as a regicide in the judgment of the vulgar.

If Milton is not sparing in his applause of the Council and its President, as little is he sparing in his denunciation of those who condemned their act. Of these, the Presbyterians had, in his opinion, the least ground for finding fault with it. He could not find words contemptuous enough for their conduct, when, after opposing the King on the field, they professed such horror of the final act of justice in his deposition and death. "Coming in the course of affairs to have their share in great actions, at least to give their voice and approbation, they begin to swerve and almost shiver at the grandeur and majesty of a noble deed, as if they were newly entered into a great sin."

On the appearance of "Eikon Basilike," and in answer to it, Milton undertook another piece of apologetic writing for the Republic. The publication of the King's book, or rather of the book which appeared in the King's name—for it was really the production of the Presbyterian

minister who afterwards became Bishop of Exeter —was designed by the Royalists to inflame the zeal of their own party, and to win over the popular sentiment to the support of the monarchy by presenting the late King in the character of a saint and martyr. In counting on the nation being greatly moved by "the portraiture of His sacred Majesty in his solitude and suffering," given in this forged book, its authors were justified by the event. But they miscalculated if they thought that it would deceive the resolved men of the Republic. They understood very well its object, and they did not belittle its possible effect. Some men, as Milton points out in his reply, had accomplished after death a revenge on their enemies, which they had failed to achieve while living. The reading of Cæsar's will had done more to win the favour of the people than all his art could do while he reigned. To foil such a posthumous victory of the King Milton wrote the "Eikonoklastes," in which he is even more severe than in the "Tenure of Kings and Magistrates" in his censure both of the character and government of Charles. In these two works which bear directly on Charles, and in all his references to him in his other writings, he has left us in no doubt of the fact that there was no one in England who

thought worse of the King than the man of loftiest spirit and most illustrious genius among all the subjects of the realm.

Within two months of the fall of the monarchy, Milton officially identified himself with the Commonwealth by accepting the Latin Secretaryship to the Council of State—a post which he continued to hold up to the Restoration. It was not, however, at his desk in Whitehall that he best served the State during that momentous period, but by his published writings in vindication of the Commonwealth—writings which made Europe ring with his fame. He rested his vindication on two grounds, one theoretical, the other practical. Milton had a strong faith in the reasonable mind of man, and to that he appealed in commending the republican form of government. He believed that it keeps a country closer to common sense than a monarchy. A republic was also magnanimous, while a monarchy was jealous, "startling at umbrages, and suspicious of men of virtuous and generous minds." It had a higher vindication still, and one which to Milton was conclusive—it was more christian. In a republic, "the greatest were servants at their own cost, were not elevated above their brethren, and might be spoken to familiarly without adoration."

But while Milton himself was an idealist, to whom to perceive a principle was to pursue it, he knew too well the temper of the English people—their aversion to *doctrinaire* politics and their passion for utility — to trust to their adhesion to the Commonwealth on mere theoretical grounds. And so he used an argument that had an edge of practical force keen enough to go home to the dullest minds. He faced them with the only possible alternative to the Republic. Were they prepared to go back to the monarchy? Were they content to resign all they had so dearly won, and to risk the revenge of the ejected dynasty? What a return to foolishness it would be if they again trusted the house of Stuart with power! His warnings to the Presbyterians who held the balance of the national decision in their hands could not have been more impassioned, and, had the page of English history after the Restoration been unfolded to his vision, they could not have been truer in their prophecy. "Woe be to you," he said, addressing the Presbyterians, "in the first place, if Charles's posterity recover the Crown of England: assure yourselves, ye are like to be first in the black list." Within two years after the return of Charles II., the ejection of nearly two thousand of their ministers from the Church

of England, and the reign of terror in Scotland led many of them to recall with bitterness the neglected warnings of Milton.

Milton, however, had more positive ground on which to commend the Commonwealth to the practical genius of the English people. It was no rash experiment to entrust the government to men like those who founded the Republic. It is always with elation that he writes of them. Where was the Englishman who was not proud to be their countryman? Where could their own nation, or any other, furnish in its history a body of citizens of such virtuous stuff, of such pure life, with so disinterested a love of liberty, of so courageous a spirit, or leaders who had such a native capacity for affairs of State? Alike in the senate and in the field of war, they had proved themselves matchless antagonists. Their resplendent deeds had been a discovery to the world of the virtue, the genius, the heroism that may slumber unsuspected in the common citizenship of a nation. Of their Chief, Milton had an appreciation which rose into veneration. In his writings, the greatness of Cromwell received the acknowledgment to which "the slow-adjudging ages came." The sonnet in which he salutes him as—

"Our Chief of men who through a cloud
Not of war only, but detractions rude
Guided by faith and matchless fortitude
To peace and truth thy glorious way hath ploughed."

—is a monument of the lofty regard in which he was held by the man among all his contemporaries whose praise was most to be coveted. In every allusion to Cromwell in his prose works the laudation is as high-pitched. So conscious was Milton of his own greatness, that hero-worship was almost unknown to him from lack of divinities; but if ever he showed it, it was in this instance. Though his mind was not of the kind that is dazzled by military genius or valour, he bestows unstinted praise on the soldier who, under the banner of liberty, made "the whole surface of the British Empire the theatre of his triumph," who shattered the royal forces in the heart of the kingdom, recovered Ireland to the Commonwealth, when, with the exception of one city, it was lost, and in a single year conquered Scotland—"a feat which for eight hundred years the English Monarchy had in vain attempted." He was impressed with Cromwell's native force of intellect, with his capacity for government, with the sanity of his judgment in affairs. But it was the moral strength of the man that captivated Milton.

"He first acquired the government of himself, and over himself acquired the most signal victories; so that on the first day he took the field against the external enemy, he was a veteran in arms, consummately practised in the toils and exigencies of war." If he had the titular nobility of England as his opponents, he, by a natural affinity, drew its real nobility to his camp, which he made a school not only of military talent, but of piety and virtue. As the head of the State, he had taken the same real precedence of all living Englishmen. He had shown himself as wise in the Cabinet as he had been valiant in the field. He was England's uncrowned king, the stay of its safety, the pillar of its glory. So manifestly did the Divine favour rest upon him that "they hardly had a proper confidence in the Supreme who, while Cromwell lived, distrusted the security of England."

Milton's tributes to Cromwell, unsurpassable as they are in laudation, never lost the note of sincerity. He could and sometimes did address Cromwell in the language of monition, reminding him that the fact that through his powerful aid England had recovered her liberties, only made the nation look to him with fresh expectation which, if disappointed, would make all the past achievements fruitless. "Often reflect what

a dear pledge the beloved land of your nativity has entrusted to your care; and that liberty which she once expected only from the chosen flower of her talents and her virtues, she now expects from you only, and by you only hopes to obtain. Revere the fond expectations which we cherish, and the solicitudes of your anxious country; revere the looks and the wounds of your brave companions in arms, who, under your banners have so strenuously fought for liberty: revere also the opinions and the hopes which foreign states entertain concerning us, who promise to themselves so many advantages from that liberty which we have so bravely acquired, from the establishment of that new government which has begun to shed its splendour on the world, which, if it be suffered to vanish like a dream, would involve us in the deepest abyss of shame: and lastly revere yourself: and after having endured so many sufferings, and encountered so many perils for the sake of liberty, do not suffer it, now it is obtained, either to be violated by yourself or, in any one instance impaired by others. You cannot be truly free, unless we are free too; for such is the nature of things, that he who encroaches on the liberty of others, is the first to lose his own and become a slave."

That Milton supported Cromwell from first to last, that he never lost confidence in his love of liberty and disinterested service of the Commonwealth, that he felt its welfare safe in his hands, is beyond doubt. Not that he deemed him beyond the need of counsel. There were certain lines of policy in which he thought he moved too slowly: there were certain acts in which he felt he had been too precipitate and impatient. But to Milton's mind this afforded no reason for withdrawing his support from a ruler of such splendid uprightness. In most of the questions on which misunderstanding arose between Cromwell and the most advanced of the Republicans, such as Vane and Overton, Milton's sympathies went with the latter; but idealist though he was, Cromwell's claims on his loyalty were too great to allow him to take any step in opposition to the Government. At the same time he made an earnest appeal to the Protector to shape his policy in accordance with the most enlightened principles of free government, and to choose as his councillors the men who had been his associates in arms and in the Parliament, who had sacrified most for liberty, and might therefore be most securely trusted with its guardianship. There were several points of government in regard to which he used the freedom of advising

him. One was as to the folly of over-legislation —the multiplying of laws interfering with the reasonable liberty of the subjects; another was the education of youth; another the freedom of the Press; another—and on this he was most urgent—was the separation of Church and State. All his influence was used to encourage the Protector to discountenance repressive and restrictive government, and to entrust the nation with a generous liberty.

Milton's hope, however, for the stability of freedom lay in the character of the people. Only their own virtue, he insisted, could keep what had been won. Within their own breasts they carried the only securities for the retention of the recovered rights of free government. If they did not rule their own spirits, if they were in bondage to their own evil passions, if they were not governed in their own lives by the principles of rectitude and godliness—if they did not use the power with which they had been invested for noble ends, they would soon fall again under the yoke of external tyranny. The ideals for a free Commonwealth and the conceptions of true national prosperity which he holds up to them, with the warnings he gives of the ruin that will befall the people whose ambitions are contrary, embody the purest wisdom for the

conduct of nations. "If," he says, "you think that it is a more grand, a more beneficial or a more wise policy to invent subtle expedients for increasing the revenue, to multiply our naval and military power, to rival in craft the ambassadors of foreign States, to form skilful treaties and alliances than to administer unpolluted justice to the people, to redress the injured and succour the distressed, and speedily to restore to every one his own, you are indeed in a cloud of error; and too late will you perceive, when the illusion of these mighty benefits have vanished, that in neglecting those which you think inferior considerations, you have only been precipitating your own ruin and despair. The fidelity of enemies and allies is frail and perishing, unless it be cemented by the principles of justice; that wealth and those honours which most covet, readily change masters; they forsake the idle and repair where virtue, where industry, where patience flourish most."

While Cromwell lived and his strong hand held the helm of State, Milton felt little concern for the future of the Commonwealth. In a letter to a friend on "The Ruptures of the Commonwealth" in October 1659, he confesses that for some time his attention to public affairs had relaxed. He was engrossed at the time with

"Paradise Lost;" but he was too jealous and alert in regard to the fortunes of liberty to have neglected them for any other interest, had he deemed them to have been in any danger. If he had lately devoted less thought to political matters, it was because the power of the State was in the hands of the man whom he trusted. He had resigned himself "to the wisdom and care of those who held government—not finding that either God or the public required more of me than my prayers for them that govern." But when the Commonwealth began to be threatened with disruption, and the agitation arose for the restoration of the Monarchy, he sprang again into his armour to do battle for the Republic. In the letter just referred to he sounded the alarm to the nation. Within a few weeks thereafter the clamour for the recall of the Stuarts had swollen to such dimensions that nothing short of a miracle could avert it. In February or March 1660, when the nation was rushing like a torrent to the cataract, he published his "Free and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth," sending a letter containing a summary of its contents to General Monk. Nothing he ever did entitles him to greater honour. It displayed pre-eminently his trust in the power of appeal to the reason and honour of his fellow-citizens.

Dr. Samuel Johnson's taunt, that on the eve of the Restoration he persisted in his resistance to it, and was fantastical enough to think that the nation, agitated as it was, might be settled by a pamphlet, recoils on himself. He judged himself rather than Milton, and showed his own inferiority of soul. It was an act that was splendid in its constancy, in its courage, in its refusal to compute the strength of his opponents, or to despair of those who might lend him an ear, in the tremendous passion for liberty with which it is aflame.

This pamphlet is for the most part a restatement of the advantages of a republic over a monarchy, and a renewed warning of the revenge which every citizen who had taken a part for freedom would invite on himself by the recall of the Stuarts, and of the derision with which history would record the folly of a people who, after obtaining liberty with so hard a struggle, surrendered it into the hands of the dynasty from which they had recovered it. But there is embodied in it the programme of a new constitution for the settlement of the Commonwealth. The main provisions were the substitution for transitory Parliaments of a permanent council of the nation, a third of the members to retire annually should this be deemed necessary as a

check to corruption in the Government, and a system of devolution of authority, by which counties, with the chief towns, would form independent communities, with their legislative council, law courts, and other institutions. In his scheme, Milton, as will be seen, anticipated the statesmanship of our own time. But the local government it projected was of a much more sweeping character than any which has been proposed in our day. It would have left little more in the hands of the central authority than the control of foreign affairs, and the settlement of disputes that might arise between the inferior councils. The merit of the scheme, in Milton's eyes, lay mainly in the opportunity it would give to the whole citizenship for training in self-government, on which, as he believed, the stability and progress of the state depended. It had the further recommendation that the local councils would discover to the people those of their fellow-citizens who were fittest to be entrusted with a place in the Supreme Council of the nation.

Milton was no worshipper of parliaments of the existing mode. They were, he says, "much liker continually to unsettle rather than to settle a free government, to breed commotions, changes, novelties and uncertainties, to bring neglect upon

present affairs and opportunities, while all minds are in suspense with expectation of a new assembly, and the assembly takes up a good space with the new settling of itself. After which, if they find no great work to do, they will make it by altering or repealing former acts and multiplying new: that they may seem to see what their predecessors saw not, and not to have assembled for nothing, till all laws be lost in the multitude of clashing statutes." The force of these objections to Parliaments like our own must be admitted. In stating them, Milton put his finger on grave defects, and these were never more palpable than in our own time. But the resort to a perpetual senate would be attended by evils as great of another kind. To lodge the power of the State in the hands of an oligarchy virtually independent of the control of the people would be an experiment dangerous to political progress. Milton thought not. He evidently relied on the power that was devolved under his scheme on the local committees, keeping the Imperial Council of the nation from obtaining an undue authority. But whatever may be thought of the plan for reforming government and securing the stability of the Republic, contained in this pamphlet, the publishing of it at such a time will always be re-

membered as one of the most remarkable proofs he gave of his love of freedom and his courage in its defence. In the history of England there is no more pathetic, there is no more heroic, figure than that of the blind Milton raising his lonely voice to avert the calamity that was impending on liberty and prepared to protest like the Hebrew prophet, with heaven and earth as witnesses, against the baseness of a people who, after doing such homage to freedom, could betray it to the house of its hereditary enemy.

CHAPTER VIII

MILTON AS AN ENGLISHMAN

WORDSWORTH says of Milton that he had a soul that "dwelt apart." There was an aloofness in him that was never lost, even in the most intimate relations of life. He stands by himself in literature: in the quality of his genius and in his style he had no pedigree nor did he leave any heirs: he is all in his own order. In public life he was a party by himself. The unhappiness of his domestic life was to a large extent due to a self-sufficiency that made him distant to his own flesh and blood. There are some natures that mix so freely with others as to lose all flavour of their own: Milton's intercourse with men had only the effect of accentuating his own individuality.

In Milton's patriotism we find the peculiarity that marks his whole character.

Every nation is egotistic, and believes in itself. In none is pride of nationality stronger than in the English and it receives abundant expression in its literature. It is interesting to compare its

greatest writers as regards their admiration of their country, and the qualities on which they place the emphasis in their praise of it. In the case of her two greatest poets there is contrast rather than agreement. Shakespeare's pride in his country was that of the natural man. He gloried in her insular security, in the incomparable valour of her arms, in her stock of men, in the virtue of English blood, in the world-wide renown of the English name. Even he, with all his power of identifying himself in turn with the passions he represents, could not conceal those which were proper to himself; and if ever the man is seen behind the mask of the dramatist, it is in those passages in the historical plays in which he makes his Englishmen speak of England—

"This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle

. . . . . .

This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world;
This precious stone set in the silver sea.

. . . . . .

This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings.

. . . . . .

This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,
Dear for her reputation through the world."

There Shakespeare spoke for himself through the mouth of Gaunt. There was the England

of his own heart. We have no hint in his works of any noble discontent with English life or of moral aspiration for his people. Of England's freedom from foreign invasion, of her national independence, he was jealous enough; but for the growth of freedom within her own bounds he showed no concern. It is only in the interest of the former that he departs from his neutrality on any matter in which religion was concerned, as when he makes King John address Pandulph, the legate of the Pope, thus:—

> "Tell him this tale; and from the mouth of England
> Add this much more; that no Italian priest
> Shall tithe or toll in our dominions—
> So tell the Pope."

Milton, with much in his temperament and his genius and his furnishing as a writer that is not of an English type nor derived from English soil, had no lack, on that account, of affection for his country. The most home-bred spirits in our literature have not shown themselves more English at the heart. If he is less aggressive than they towards other nations in his praise of his own, it is only because he admires her for excellences which are the noblest and therefore the most human and universal. When he gave himself up to a literary career he resolved that he would write in the English tongue and for the

honour and instruction of his country. "For which cause," he said, in "The Reason of Church Government," "I applied myself to that resolution which Ariosto followed against the persuasions of Bembo, to fix all the industry and art I could unite to the adorning of my native tongue; not to make verbal curiosities the end (that were a toilsome vanity), but to be an interpreter and relater of the best and sagest things among mine own citizens throughout this island in the mother dialect. That what the greatest and choicest wit of Athens, Rome, or modern Italy, and those Hebrews of old, did for their country, I, in my proportion with this over and above, of being a Christian, might do for mine; not caring to be ever named abroad, though perhaps I could attain to that, but content with these British Islands as my world." In the "Epitaphium Damonis" he had earlier expressed the same resolve—

"Prize sufficiently ample
Mine, and distinction great (unheard of ever thereafter
Though I should be and inglorious through the world of the stranger),
If but yellow-haired Ouse shall read me, drinker of Alan,
Humber, which whirls as it flows, and Trent's whole valley of orchards,
Thames, my own Thames above all, and Tamar's western waters,
Tawny with ores when the white waves swinge the far Orkneys."

Milton's estimate of the intellectual powers of his own people was high pitched. One of the grounds of his protest in the "Areopagitica" against licensing was the disparagement it implied of the fertility of the English mind. "To me it seems," he said, "an undervaluing and vilifying of the whole nation. I cannot set so light by all the invention, the art, the wit, the grave and solid judgment which is in England, as that it can be comprehended in any twenty capacities how good soever; much less that it should not pass except their superintendence be over it, except it be sifted and strained with their strainers that it should be uncurrent without their manual stamp. Lords and Commons of England! consider what nation it is whereof ye are, and whereof ye be governors! A nation, not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious and piercing spirit; acute to invent, subtile and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point, the highest that human capacity can soar to."

But Milton's pride in the English people attached itself, above all, to the faith and morals which they held. The England of his heart was the England that bore the image of his own soul upon it—the England of the Reformation and the Revolution—the England that, in the previous

century and in his own, had proved itself so genial a soil for the growth of liberty and true religion. "What," he asks in his preface to the "Defensio Secunda," "can conduce more to the beauty and glory of one's country than the recovery not only of its civil but its religious liberty." The fetters a nation wears in its soul are its worst bondage, and from those fetters England had been freeing herself during the last hundred years. It is always at the height of elation that Milton writes of the Reformation. "When I recall how the bright and blissful Reformation (by divine power) struck through the black and settled night of ignorance and anti-Christian tyranny, methinks a sovereign and reviving joy must needs rush into the bosom of him that reads or hears; and the sweet odour of the returning Gospel imbathe his soul with the fragrancy of heaven." To England had been given the honour of being the first "to blow the evangelic trump to the nations, holding up as from a hill the new lamp of saving light to all Christendom. It was our Wickliffe's preaching at which all the successive reformers more effectually lighted their tapers." In his own time, when the Reformation itself needed to be reformed, England was again called to the front in the

work. God was revealing Himself and "as His manner is, first to His Englishmen." I know no instance, even of English egotism, that quite equals this audacity. But if he was not diffident in claiming so high a priority for his nation, neither was he insensible to the charge it laid on his people, nor slow in provoking his fellow-citizens to give the lead to neighbouring nations in the pursuit of virtue, freedom, and religion. His patriotism was of the prophetic order. His fondest aspiration for England was to see her discharge the mission to which Heaven had called her, to communicate the gifts of civilisation and freedom among cities, kingdoms and nations, as the hero of Grecian mythology distributed the fruits of Ceres, corn and bread, from region to region. There was nothing insular or monopolising in his patriotism. If he was not grudging in his praise of his country's virtues, still less was he silent about its faults. National honour, he said, was better guarded by overcoming defects than by boasting of gifts. He never conceited that everything that is English is right, but he sought always that everything that was right should be English.

The truest patriot is treated often as an enemy and an alien. If he is not driven forth from

his native soil, he is excluded from the sympathy and affection of his countrymen. So it was with Milton. In a letter to a German friend written in 1666 he says: "It gives me pleasure to think that after so long an interval I have again occurred to your remembrance. Though, owing to the luxuriance of your praise, you seem almost to lead me to suspect that you had quite forgotten one in whom you say that you admire the union of so many virtues; from such an union I might dread too numerous a progeny, if it were not evident that the virtues flourish most in penury and distress. But one of these virtues has made me but an ill return for her hospitable reception in my breast; for what you term policy, and which I wish that you had rather called patriotic piety, has, if I may so say, almost left me, who was charmed with so sweet a sound, without a country. *Patria est ubicunque est bene.*" The noblest patriots have had to find all their comfort in themselves and in their cause. Of no one is this truer than of Milton.

CHAPTER IX

MILTON AS A CONTROVERSIALIST

The poetic and controversial temperaments are seldom found together, but they were united in two of the greatest names in literature—Dante and Milton. In the "Divina Commedia," even in the "Paradiso," the poet never lifts his eye altogether from Italy and Florence—from the disorders of the Church and the Empire—from his personal adversaries. He never altogether lays aside the lash of his invective, and the higher he rises in his journey through the spheres of the saints and the more he sees of their order and harmony, he applies it with the greater severity to those who were the authors of the turbulent life of the world he has left behind. In Milton's poems the controversial element is more incidental and occasional—its eruptions are fewer and briefer—but it is never altogether absent. It breaks out in "Comus," in "Lycidas," and in many of the sonnets. In "Paradise Lost" it is seldom of a personal type,

though even there we find allusions to the civil conflicts in which he had taken so great a part. But the poem is from first to last a controversy, and the congeniality which the author found in such a subject is always unmistakable.

Milton, in fact, was a born fighter. He came of a stubborn stock. His grandfather was a recusant in the time of Elizabeth and was heavily fined more than once for his adherence to the Church of Rome. His father became a Protestant in his youth and was disowned and disinherited by the grandfather. Milton, like his sires, gave himself up entirely to his convictions, avowed them, urged them, did battle for them. He never looked about him for allies when he had a principle in hand. Of nothing was he so proud as of his advocacy of "discountenanced truth." He was a manly combatant; he never whimpered at his adversaries' strokes and always gave as hard blows in return.

In his discussion of public questions Milton never lost the idealism of the poet. He always sought to "set up a mark of everlasting light above the ebb and flow" of policy. He reckoned his task to be done when he had shown the nation a more excellent way, and he gave scarcely any heed to obstructions. Enough if he had set the compass right; it was the business of states-

men to steer by it, whatever traditions they had to throw overboard. He made small allowance for the difficulties of the actual situation and was impatient of the fears and hesitations which detain statesmen from the path of reform. There was no failing for which he was naturally so unfitted to admit excuse as moral timidity. The fusion of the poetic and controversial tempers in Milton was sometimes a source of weakness. The argumentative passages in his poems drag; the poetical passages in his arguments bear him into too aerial a region for English statesmen with their ingrained faith in *terra firma*. Star-gazing in business hours has always been for them the sin that is without forgiveness.

But it is, after all, his flights of poetical idealism that are the vital and antiseptic elements in Milton's prose works. They are so, not only because of their rich and splendid eloquence, but because they give expression to the aspirations which must always make their way to recognition among a free people, and shame in the end the opportunism that has held them in check. He that writes to himself, it has been said, writes to an eternal public. So Milton wrote. His speech was always in the language of to-morrow and never became acclimatised in his own day.

Milton was not skilled in the tactics of controversy and indeed was at no pains to acquire them. He gave little heed to the marshalling of his case, to proportion and sequence, to the ordering of his argument so as to secure progress and convergence to its destination. It advances by no predetermined route. The historical retrospects by which he supports his theses are fatiguing, and when we emerge from them and come again on passages written in his noble style, these are as grateful as oases to those who have travelled over great spaces of barren sand.

Milton lacked the sympathy, the self-detachment and the patience that are needed to admit us to an opponent's position, and often give us the best chance of dislodging him. He always fought by frontal attack. He reckoned it enough to have convictions on which no breath of self-suspicion ever passed, and to give them forth with the passion with which he felt them himself. He never treated with opponents; he made no accommodations and no compromises. He wrote, in fact, like one whose aim might have been rather to crush than convert.

Milton's invective is merciless and his vituperation without restraint. His pamphlets are unparalleled in literature for the change of voice

that characterises them. In one page it is the tongue of an angel—in another it is the tongue of a street-scold. His invention is racked for epithets of ridicule and abuse. Of the humour that breaks out into ringing laughter he had none; of a quiet genial playful humour he had little; but of humour of the grim and saturnine order he had enough and to spare. Of one of the two chief victims of his vituperation he writes: "The conflict between me and Salmasius is now finally terminated by his death, and I will not write against the dead, nor will I reproach him with the loss of life as he did me with the loss of sight, though there are some who impute his death to the penetrating severity of my strictures which he rendered only more sharp by his endeavours to resist." Of the other he says, "There is one, More, part Frenchman and part Scot, so that one country and one people cannot be quite overwhelmed with the whole infamy of his extraction." For pure virulence there is probably in satiric writing nothing to match the words in which he addresses this same victim, when, after remarking that if he had had his deserts he would long ago have gone to the gibbet, he adds, "Your great professorship is now all that is left you, and this you will soon lose, except one single letter, of which you will not be

the professor, but the pupil, pensile from the top ⊓" (*sic*).

The bitter controversial temper of his time and the fact that the most vituperative of his works were written in the Latin tongue, in which more licence in satire was allowed by the canons of literary taste, have been pled, if not in defence at least in extenuation of Milton's virulence. But Milton would have disclaimed the apology of his friends. What they deplore as a fault he regarded as an honour. "It requires a man," he says, "of integrity, who is conscious of integrity, to vituperate. Vituperation of the bad and praise of the good are of equal efficacy. . . . There may be a sanctified bitterness against the enemies of the truth." He was of the same mind as Dante, whose abuse of his adversaries was as savage and who justified it on the ground that to be rude to them was courtesy. In one of his attacks on the bishops, after remarking that "religion could receive no wound by any disgrace thrown upon them, since religion and they surely were never in such amity—that they were rather the men who had wounded religion, and whose stripes must heal her," he justifies his vituperation as being only the reflection of their own malignity. He would tell them "what Electra in Sophocles answered her mother who

thought herself too violently reproved by her daughter—

> ''Tis you that say, not I; you do the deeds
> And your ungodly deeds find me the words.'"

There are probably few who will feel that Milton has succeeded in his defence, or lifted the shadow of his acrimony from his pages; and those who most reverence him will be the last to acquit him. It was no doubt difficult for one with his intense nature to moderate his language either of praise or blame. That the severity of his censure was for the most part an inverted love of right is also to be allowed. But when page after page is filled with strained epithets of ridicule and contempt, we think less of the damage he is inflicting on his opponents' positions than of the wounds he is inflicting on his own reputation. It is true that the individuals of an age are not to be singled out and condemned for the faults of their age. And yet there are exceptions of whom this is only partially true. There are in every age men of high endowment and refined spirit to whom we look for the purifying of the moral atmosphere of their age; and when they, in any part of their conduct, fall to the level of its ordinary manners, we are justly disappointed. Milton is pre-eminently one of these. In his ideals and in the general tenor of his life he

rose to a height to which few in any age attain; but in this particular respect he is in the same condemnation with his contemporaries. Had he been a commoner in character, his bitter and often grotesque vituperation would only have provoked ridicule; but when we think that Milton was the writer, we can only read it with amazement and regret.

"Who would not laugh if such a man there be!
Who would not weep if Atticus were he!"

CHAPTER X

MILTON'S APOLOGIA PRO VITA SUA; "SAMSON AGONISTES"

INTO the literary character of the "Samson Agonistes" it is not my purpose to enter; it is only for its autobiographical value that I now consider it. Every work of Milton, whether in prose or verse, has much of this kind of value, his personality was so mingled with all he wrote; but of all his poems, this gives the fullest disclosure of the man, and leaves us with the deepest impression of his moral greatness.

"Paradise Lost," "Paradise Regained" and "Samson Agonistes" were all written after the Restoration. That fact shows the tremendous vitality of Milton. Think of his circumstances at the time. Twenty years before he had sacrificed literary fame to the duties of a generous citizenship and flung everything else aside to serve the cause of freedom. For nearly all that time he, as the literary champion of the Puritans mighty in word as Cromwell in arms, had laboured in season and out of season; he had

performed in the controversies of the time as many feats of strength as the hero of his tragedy; in the defence of liberty he had shown a resolution that never faltered, a courage that never failed, a passion that never cooled; in his noble task he had lost his eyesight. When the reaction in favour of the Monarchy set in at the death of Charles, he only became more fervent in the cause—

> "His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal,
> Nor numbers nor example with him wrought
> To swerve from truth or change his constant mind."

His was the last voice raised on behalf of the expiring liberties of England.

There was, therefore, no man in the country whose spirit one might have expected to be more broken by the Restoration. It swept away the fruits of years of toil; it blasted his dearest hopes; it prostrated the whole edifice which he and so many valorous compatriots had built up; it left him aged and poor and friendless in the midst of enemies. It might well have been that the disappointment crushed his spirit —it might well have been with himself as it was with the English patriot of his own sonnet, of whom he says—

> "Sad the breaking of that Parliament
> Broke him, as that dishonest victory
> At Chaeronea, fatal to liberty,
> Kill'd with report that old man eloquent."

It was in these circumstances—it was under those evil conditions that he resumed his singing-robes, and girt himself for the labours of his two great epics and this tragedy. Is there anything more heroic in the history of literature?

"Samson Agonistes" was published in 1671—three years before Milton's death. It was the last of his poems, and with it, like Samson himself, he "heroicly finished a life heroic." By a curious irony of destiny, he had, as far back as his thirty-second year, when speculating on subjects for poetic treatment, selected among others the story of Samson; and that it continued to occupy his mind is shown by his allusion to it in his prose works. He little dreamt in his youth that there would be tragic elements in his own life, like those in Samson's, for his earlier years were as serene and unclouded as his later were stormy and dark.

This tragedy was Milton's "Apologia pro vita sua." It was a diaphanous allegory of his own life as it appeared to himself at its close, and when he surveyed it in the light of Providence. There were many obvious respects in which the story of Samson lent itself to his purpose. There were his hero's separation from his birth to an extraordinary career, his Nazaritic breeding, his prodigious strength—at once his glory and his

bane—his championship of Israel against the Philistines, his glee in provoking his enemies, his great exploits, his marriage out of his own tribe with its disastrous consequences, his captivity and blindness, his abject condition amongst his enemies, the sport the Philistines made of him, and, finally, the fell stroke of vengeance, by which at their *Dagonalia* he overwhelmed their priests and their nobility in a common death.

It is not my intention to trace the allegory in detail with all its autobiographic riches, but only to indicate where these are to be found and how Milton in his poem sums up the meaning of his own life and forecasts his place in history.

In Samson's consciousness of his divine vocation and his heaven-bestowed strength, in the austerity with which Israel's mighty champion had been reared—"whose drink was only from the liquid brook," and in the admiration of his feats expressed by his countrymen and even by his enemies, we need have no hesitation in discerning Milton's lofty conception of his own character and destiny, his pride in the Puritan breeding and pure life, and his sense of the impression he had made on the nation and the world. We have seen how frank he was in self-laudation. The real hero who was present to his mind—the irresistible Samson, the glory

of Israel, the dread of her foes—who made "arms ridiculous," and

> "with a strength
> Equivalent to angels' walked their streets,
> None offering fight; . . .
> Himself an army,"

was no other than John Milton, who had, single-handed, routed the whole host of Royalist writers.

The public-spiritedness of Milton, the supremacy of the commonweal in his thought, his high sense of the responsibility attached to great powers, are shown in the passion he throws into the remorseful thoughts which rushed upon the lonely Samson like a swarm of hornets, as he remembered how he had prostituted in sensual delights the strength Heaven gave him for the deliverance of his people, and had brought shame on Israel. Had Milton not been "an awful soul;" had he not recognised the sacred trust that belongs to lofty gifts; had the ideal of his own life not been

> "The benignant strength of one, transformed
> To joy of many,"

he could not have written these passages of "Samson Agonistes." There are passions which cannot be feigned. Milton could never have forgiven himself had he spent on private ends the powers conferred on him for the general good.

"How could I once look up, or heave the head,
Who, like a foolish pilot, have shipwracked
My vessel trusted to me from above,
Gloriously rigged?"

One of the clearest points of contact between Milton and his hero lay in the ill-starred marriage of each. Like Samson, Milton had married out of his own tribe when he brought the daughter of a Royalist family to his Puritan home, and the marriage had been the bane of his life. How much he suffered through it, how its failure embittered his existence, what a twist it wrought in all his thoughts about women, and how it involved him in the fiercest controversy of his life, we have already seen. In the poem the recriminations between husband and wife fill a large place, and the proportion was the same in the life of the poet. Time did nothing to soften the memory of his domestic misery and its cause—

"I see thou art implacable, more deaf
To prayers than winds or seas. Yet winds to seas
Are reconciled at length, and sea to shore.
Thy anger, unappeasable, still rages,
Eternal tempest never to be calmed."

and not even in the "Divorce Pamphlets" does Milton more sternly enforce the subjection of women than in this poem—

> "Therefore God's universal law
> Gave to the man despotic power
> Over his female in due awe,
> Nor from that right to part an hour,
> Smile she or lour."

When Dalila with her "honeyed words" retired from her interview with Samson, a visitor of "rougher tongue" drew near—Harapha, the renowned giant of Gath, who had come to see the Hebrew champion of whose incredible doings he had heard such loud report. In Samson's part in the wordy encounter we have a picture of the way in which Milton handled such opponents as Salmasius and Morus, Bishop Hall and the Westminster Divines—of his love of fight, his provocativeness, his audacity, his unmeasured vituperation, his unconcealed consciousness of transcendent powers, his contempt for antagonists, his impatience of the silence in regard to public affairs that was forced on him after the Restoration.

"Samson Agonistes" is Milton's last testimony to those principles of liberty which he maintained throughout his life and to which he only became more devoted when their fortunes receded to the lowest ebb. It is his protest against the Restoration, and the relapse of the nation into bondage to the Stuarts. It is his lamentation over the downfall of the

Commonwealth and the moral decay that followed. It is an artistic version of the matter contained in his prose. The more we study the poem the more we are amazed at the subjectivity with which the Hebrew story is treated. It is made to reflect all the contentions of Milton's life, his loves and his hates, his attitudes to the men and movements of his time, his irreconcilable hostility to the Monarchy, his contempt for priests and courtiers, his scorn for those who had opposed the tyranny of Charles up to a certain point and then gone over to the Royalists, his bitter resentment of the nation surrendered to the old tyranny of the liberties that had been wrested from it at such a cost.

In his circumstances at the time, when he was a man marked by the Government, it was an audacity to publish a work which, under the thin veil of its poetic form, reproduced the essence of his prose works which were so adverse to the Royalists; but it was like the man. Of Charles II. and his court he might have said, in the words of Samson regarding Harapha—

"I dread him not, nor all his giant brood."

How did Milton bear the accumulated calamities of his closing years—his blindness, his penury, his feeble health, his loneliness, the

ruin of all his patriotic hopes, the contumely of his enemies? We may learn this too from the poem. When the loss of his eyesight came upon him he bore it with a noble fortitude; he did not allow it to interfere with his writings in defence of liberty, and even spoke of it as a blessing. But now it was different, when he had to endure it without alleviation from the joy of his public labours and the friendship of those who shared them; when he was surrounded by enemies, and when infirmity of age was creeping upon him and he felt more his dependence on others and his lack of the solaces of domestic life. His soliloquy on his blindness in "Samson Agonistes" is poignant with melancholy:—

"O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!
Blind among enemies! O worse than chains,
Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!
Light, the prime work of God, to me 's extinct,
And all her various objects of delight
Annull'd, which might in part my grief have eased.
Inferior to her vilest now become
Of man or worm, the vilest here excel me:
They creep, yet see; I, dark in light, exposed
To daily fraud, contempt, abuse and wrong,
Within doors or without, still as a fool
In power of others—never in my own—
Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half.
O dark, dark, dark amid the blaze of noon,
Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse
Without all hope of day!"

There were two causes that aggravated the misery of Milton's blindness, and both are alluded to in these lines. One was the unnatural conduct of his daughters, in regard to whom, when they contested his nuncupative will with his widow, evidence was borne that they had conspired "to cheat their father with their marketings, made away with some of his books, and would have sold the rest to the dunghill women." The other was the hatred and contempt with which he was regarded by the Royalists. They had spared his life, but he continued in his obscurity to be the butt of their scorn. How scurrilous were the attacks upon him may be judged by the style of one of their writers, who speaks of him as "an old heretic, both in religion and manners, that by his will would shake off his governors as he doth his wives, four in a fortnight. He is so much an enemy to usual practices, that I believe when he is condemned to travel to Tyburn in a cart he will petition for the favour to be the first man that was ever drawn thither in a wheelbarrow."

Milton would have been more than human had he been able to maintain his natural cheerfulness under such a weight of misfortune. That it had given way—that he had times of dejection—is

evident from the lines in which Samson bewails himself:—

"All otherwise to me my thoughts portend—
That these dark orbs no more shall treat with light,
Nor the other light of life continue long,
But yield to double darkness nigh at hand;
So much I feel my genial spirits droop,
My hopes all flat: nature within me seems
In all her functions weary of herself;
My race of glory run, and race of shame,
And I shall shortly be with them that rest."

How deeply Milton, in his last days, felt the perplexities of providence in the caprices of fortune appears in the words of the Chorus:—

"God of our fathers! what is Man,
That Thou towards him with hand so various—
Or might I say contrarious?—
Temper'st Thy providence through his short course:
Not evenly, as thou rul'st
The angelic orders, and inferior creatures mute,
Irrational and brute?
Nor do I name of men the common rout,
That, wandering loose about,
Grow up and perish as the summer fly,
Heads without name, no more remembered;
But such as Thou hast solemnly elected,
With gifts and graces eminently adorned,
To some great work, Thy glory,
And people's safety, which in part they effect.
Yet toward these, thus dignified, Thou oft,
Amidst their highth of noon,
Changest Thy countenance and Thy hand, with no regard
Of highest favours past
From Thee to them, or them to Thee of service.

Nor only dost degrade them, or remit
To life obscured, which were a fair dismission,
But throw'st them lower than Thou did'st exalt them high—
Unseemly falls in human eye,
Too grievous for the trespass or omission ;
Oft leav'st them to the hostile sword
. . . . . .
Or to the unjust tribunals, under change of times
And condemnation of the ungrateful multitude.
. . . . . In fine,
Just or unjust alike seem miserable
For oft alike both come to evil end."

Here we catch Milton speaking his thoughts aloud as in many an hour of reverie he reviewed his own chequered life.

But whatever gloom settled on his spirit, he never sank into despair; he never doubted that the clouds which concealed the face of the Eternal would break; he never lost faith in "the ultimate dispose" of His wisdom. When Samson yielded to the commands of the Philistine lords and rose to accompany their officers to the theatre where he was to make them sport, these were his last words to his countrymen :—

"Be of good courage ; I begin to feel
Some rousing motions in me, which dispose
To something extraordinary my thoughts.
. . . . . .
If there be aught of presage in the mind,
This day will be remarkable in my life
By some great act, or of my days the last."

Who needs an interpreter to tell him that in these words Milton declares his confidence that through the last feats of his strength, the crowning efforts of his genius—"Paradise Lost," "Paradise Regained" and this tragedy—he would cover with shame the Philistines of England for their mockery of the greatest of the Puritans and leave to the nation and to the world an imperishable name? They are a triumphant prophecy of the resurgence of his own fame; and the presage is repeated still more imposingly in the magnificent chant of the Semi-Chorus, where the blind and despised Samson is represented as suddenly inspired, coming among his enemies assembled on the tiers of the theatre like tame fowl on their perches, apparently no more to be feared than an evening dragon, and then, as in a moment, transmuted into an eagle swooping down upon them from above and bolting his "cloudless thunder on their heads." So certain was the poet that the tragedy that was his real subject would end in victory. It is a pleasing thought to all who love Milton and appreciate his chivalrous services to liberty, that, with all he had to endure, he never knew the worst sorrow that can come to a noble spirit—the sense of Heaven's desertion, that in the darkest hours

of his fortunes he had the priceless solace of the assurance that the Highest would vindicate his name and lift it as high above the reach of detraction as the star in the firmament stands above the soiling touch of the smoke and dust of the world.

CHAPTER XI

MILTON'S DIVIDED REPUTATION

THERE is a singularity in Milton's reputation. Every genius of the first rank, after it may be slow contemporary recognition, soon rises into his fixed place in the admiration of the world, and is judged with a judgment that endures as the decision of history. So it has been with Milton. But what is exceptional in his case is that, with the greater number, the admiration has been given to only one half of his character and work, and withheld from the other. In fact, in respect of reputation there has always been, and there now is, not one Milton, but two. One is the Milton who wrote "Paradise Lost," the other is the Milton of the prose works. There is Milton the poet, and Milton the politician and polemic. There is the Milton who sang of the war in heaven, and the Milton who took part in the civil strife of his day in England. The fame of the one abides no questioning—"his leaf shall fade not, neither fall,"—but there are many who regard the memory of the other as one that were better lost. Of the debt we owe to Milton, one

half has not only not been acknowledged, but has been regarded as a deduction from the other half. The sovereign poet skilled to "sing of time or eternity," we praise; but the great citizen, the *severissimus veræ libertatis auctor*, the man who sought to illustrate eternal principles in the things of time, we fail to appreciate. Such a divided judgment would not have been surprising if the two had been opposed; but so far from being opposite, they are harmonious parts of the same whole. So any true perception of either will lead us to regard them. The apparent duality in the life only serves, when understood, to manifest its real integrity.

We might infer from the history of his reputation that there were qualities in Milton which are not often found in combination. There were such qualities. But often the contrasts that are present in the same personality, instead of breaking up its unity, only enrich and strengthen it. So it is in Milton's case. There was in his life a marriage of opposites.

The Hebrew and the Greek mind, we may say, divide the world of men between them. Some are worshippers of right, others are votaries of beauty: there are some with whom it is the moral sentiment that is the most powerful, and there are others with whom it is the æsthetic;

with some it is conscience, with others it is taste. This is the difference that mainly causes the antipathies of minds. Milton's character was a composite of both types, and of both in an extraordinary degree. His nature was in this respect amphibious. This accounts for the opposite ways in which he affects the same minds. To be drawn to the one pole, is to be repelled by the other. So those in whom the artistic mind prevails have not more admired him as a poet than they have been irritated by him as a politician.

It would show little insight into Milton to allow that he had a double mind in any sense that would imply that his was a nature divided against itself. To him the right and the true were the primary elements of all real beauty. So he could not consent to the severance of artistic production from moral purpose and the service it owes to the culture of common life. Milton's art was as sacred to him as his religion, for it was a part of it. His furnishing was not to be obtained by the invocation of "Dame Memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim, with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the life of whom he pleases." It has been observed that the Christian religion

has always kept two strong habits with regard to art. It has always been restless under the sway of any art that did not breathe with spiritual and moral purpose. And in its more earnest moods it has always shown itself ready to sacrifice the choicest works of artistic beauty to the restoration or preservation of the simple majesty of righteousness, the purity of holiness, the glory of God.[1]

Such was the art of Milton. He reckoned that a virtuous and healthy life is the most necessary preparation for poetical composition, and that to promote the same in others is its chief end. He thought no art so beautiful as good living.

These were Milton's principles from the first. It was these principles that determined the character of his poetry, which throughout has, we may say, but one theme—the beauty of virtue. It was the same principles that led him to suspend for a while his poetical labours, that he might throw himself into the political struggle which he regarded as necessary to give the citizens of England a chance of living a life worthy of a great people. It was to him the more urgent task, and he could do no other. It made no real break in the unity of his life. He was still engaged in the same high service; he was only using different faculties for the same

[1] Phillips Brooks.

object. When a moment came in the national life which gave him the opportunity of joining his fellow-citizens in putting into action the ideals of which his poetry was the symbolisation, he unhesitatingly embraced it. Wordsworth, writing of a visit to France on the eve of the Revolution, when the nation stood "on the top of golden hours," tells us how he was thrilled with delight when he saw, as he passed through the land—

> "How bright a face is worn when joy of one
> Is joy of tens of millions."

Milton felt that such a dawn for liberty had broken on England, and his eagerness to help a cause that promised so general a good overcame all the solicitations of personal pleasure and private ambition. It was a handsome choice—as handsome as Cromwell's when he forsook his simple country life, when—

> "from his private garden where
> He lived reserved and austere,
> As if his only plot
> To plant the bergamot"

he plunged into the storm and turbulence of civil war.

The history of literature is not without other instances of the same double passion in the life. In this respect, with all their diversity, Milton and Dante were kindred spirits. Dante toiled and

suffered as Milton did for the political regeneration of his country. He had no rest in his soul when "all Italia's lands were full of tyrants." Milton, in his denunciations of the bishops as the ruin of the English State, does not exceed the severity with which Dante bids the priests of Italy remain at their prayers, and leave to Cæsar the high seat of rule. "He wrote," says Mazzini, "as he would have acted, and the pen in his hand became like a sword; nor is it without a purpose that he places a sword in the hand of Homer, the sovereign poet." The same writer reminds us that Dante's prose works, in which he expresses the national aspirations of Italy, were for long treated with the same neglect as Milton's.

In the life of Michael Angelo, the greatest genius of the most illustrious period of Italian art, there is a passage which reminds us of Milton. In 1539, when he was engaged in some of his greatest sculptures, in which he expressed his passion for his native land and his tragic sense of her sorrows, he interrupted his work to superintend the defence of Florence against the Medici.

The Italian patriot of last century who has just been quoted, Mazzini, made a renunciation like Milton's for the sake of his country. No purer spirit ever dedicated himself to the service of liberty. Literature was his first love, and he

had powers of intellect and imagination by which he might have hoped to produce works which would have lived. But he chose a nobler life-work. "A thousand visions," he says, "of historical dramas and romances floated before my mental eye—artistic images that caressed my spirit, as visions of gentle maidens soothe the soul of the lonely hearted. The natural bias of my mind was very different from that which has been forced upon me by the times in which I have lived and the shame of our degradation." The pressing question for him, and for all who had the same gifts, was—Are we to have a country? The liberation of Italy must first be achieved, then the art of Italy would bloom and flourish over their graves.

In accounting for the disesteem of Milton's political writings we have also to remember the nature of his idealism. There are idealists who offend nobody. They are content to embody their ideals in literature, or art, or song, or eloquent speech. They leave them there: they leave them in the air, and give themselves no concern about their application to actual life. For such idealists all men have a large tolerance. They do not challenge the *vis inertiæ* of society; they disturb no existing institution, they arouse no hostility. Indeed, the loftier their ideals are,

provided they are only given forth as dreams or devout imaginations, the less will society resent them, inasmuch as it will reckon itself the less likely to be urged to realise them.

But there are idealists of another type. They have a passion for righteousness. They are provocative idealists. They are born to strife. They soon discover that while there are many who will acquiesce in ideals by the bushel so long as they remain in the air, there are few who will bear a grain of them when it is proposed to put them into operation.

Milton's idealism was of this kind. It led him to press for actual reformation. So when the opportunity for action came he left the aerial and untroubled region of solitary contemplation, descended to the vexed field of politics, and took his side with those who sought to lead the nation into better paths.

It would seem that the censure Milton has received at the hands of many of his critics has been provoked not so much by his taking a part in politics as by the part which he did take and the zeal which he displayed in it. Had it been otherwise they could hardly have refrained from reproaching other masters of English literature who ranged themselves as distinctly on the side of absolutism as Milton did on the side of liberty.

That he was less prudent and more serious would, we should have thought, only have redounded to his honour.

There could be no more ill-founded an opinion than that to attach ourselves to a party in the State, however much we may be in harmony with its principles and its aims, is to injure our own individuality. Mazzini has very well observed that those who abstain from party from this motive "are generally the first to succumb, and that in the most servile manner, to any strongly organised governing power."

That Milton did not consider his own ease and reputation, and remain in studious retirement to cultivate his genius, but came forth and played manfully his part as a citizen of England when all her dearest liberties were at stake, may well heighten the reverence with which we cherish his name. And if it be true that our character is shaped by our admirations, we could desire nothing better for our times than a revival of interest in one whose life was such an example of manhood, and who in his writings has so taught us the secret of strengthening the basis of the national character and purifying the national aspirations.

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